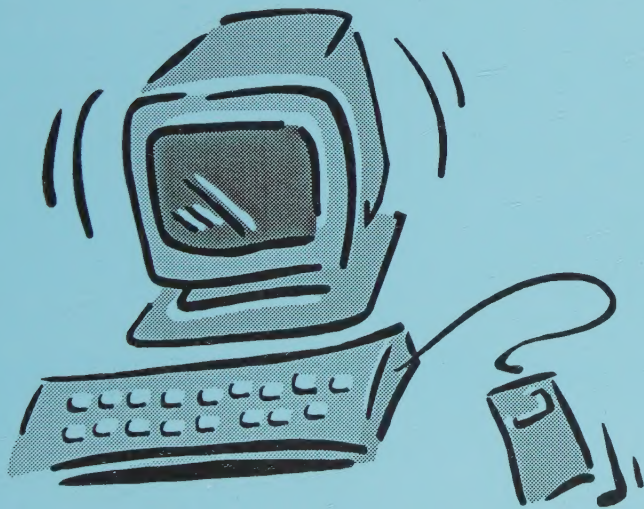


The Temp Worker's Guide To Self-Fulfillment

How to slack off, achieve your
dreams, and get paid for it!



by Dennis Fiery

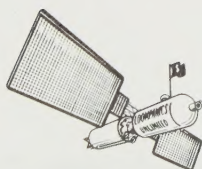
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Loompanics Unlimited
Port Townsend, Washington

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About the Author

Dennis Fiery has temped in many industries, including ad agencies, book publishers, magazines, retail shops, fashion studios, financial companies, telecommunications and technology firms, educational institutions, and government offices. Over the course of all these temp assignments he has learned how to exploit and undermine the temp system, which he enjoys doing at every opportunity. He wrote this book on the job, on company time, while temping at a variety of firms, using office equipment and supplies unknowingly donated by those companies.

Does Temping Really Suck?

I Wrote This On The Job

Man, it's hot out there today. That's okay, I'm sitting back in my cool, air-conditioned office. Wiggling my toes, my shoes are off. I've got a mini-refrigerator in here loaded with sodas and snacks. I've got a computer with state-of-the-art software, and I'm just kicking back, relaxing, and starting my book.

June 17

Ogilvy & Mather
ad agency, \$15/hour

You see, I'm a temp. That means I'm a temporary employee, and I'm getting paid \$15 an hour to do nothing. When I left the temp agency this morning there were 23 other men and women still sitting there, still waiting for a job. I was picked first today (I usually am), and sent out on the first assignment of the day. Some of those remaining people will get back-breaking jobs, hard physical labor, which is morally demeaning and exhausting. Others will sit in the waiting room for hours until they finally give up and go home. "No work today," they'll mumble, "maybe tomorrow..." But they're wrong — there *was* work today — only *I* got it, not them. Not only did I get work, I got *great work*! I got work that requires no effort on my part, no exertion, no stress. My job is to sit here in a chair and do nothing. *And get paid for it!*

So, while I'm sitting here "doing nothing," I will read, research, conquer my credit card bills, make phone calls, write some letters, send out a few résumés, improve myself, and learn, grow, collect free stuff, collect a paycheck and — oh yes — write my book.

Conspiracy Theories

“That bitch Melissa Chen!”¹

I looked up surprised at the sweaty Puerto Rican as he lifted a heavy box and dragged it across the room. Why was he calling Melissa Chen a bitch? Melissa was my “counselor” at the temp agency. She’s the one who sends me out on assignments. Usually she awards me cushy, high-paying temp jobs. That day all she had available was this: \$9.50 an hour setting up a fashion show for Calvin Klein. It was a lot less than I usually get: and it was hard labor; and it certainly was not air-conditioned, but I thought it would be fun and maybe even a little glamorous, too. Besides, Melissa had shown me her stack of job orders, and this was the best of the lot. Melissa was nice. I *liked* Melissa Chen.

“Fucking bitch.” He threw down the box. “She purposely didn’t assign me jobs all week. Now she knows I’m money-starved so she gives me this shit. Of course I take it, what else am I gonna do?”

Had Melissa really done that to him? I thought back over my own week. It was my first week with this new temp agency. Monday I was placed at one of the world’s largest ad agencies (where I sat and did nothing). Tuesday I was placed at a national entertainment magazine (where I made a few printouts, but that was all my work for the whole day). Wednesday I was back at the ad agency for another easy assignment. On Thursday and Friday I was working the fashion

¹ All names refer to real people I’ve met while temping. However, all names have been changed to retain anonymity.

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show of my own free volition. Not bad for a first week. Was Melissa really a bitch? I didn't think so. I think the Puerto Rican just didn't know how to beat the temp game. I've heard other conspiracy theories while talking to temps, everything from: "They don't want me, because they want a cute sexy girl who will sit on their lap." through: "They purposely don't send me out even though I have the skills, just because I didn't pass those stupid tests," to the ubiquitous: "They want a *white* face on the job."

All those conspiracy-mongers are wrong! It's not for *any* of those reasons. The simple truth is, temp agencies, human-resource personnel, and anyone looking to hire someone for any job will tell you the same story: It's hard to find good people. Those temps didn't get jobs *because they weren't good people*. How do you become a "good person" in the eyes of the agencies? That's what the next section of this book will teach you.

Into The Easy Jobs

Winning The Temp Game

Winning the temp game and landing cushy jobs is a matter of three important points:

1. you need *skills*;
2. you need to *prove* you have those skills;
3. you need to be *presentable*.

June 18
Ogilvy & Mather,
\$15/hour (Day 2).
Sighted David Letterman
while strolling the city
on lunch break today.

If you've got the skills that companies seek, you've got it made. If you don't, it's digging ditches for you. And if you're unpresentable, it doesn't matter how good your skills are, forget it, you won't even get the blue-collar jobs. In subsequent chapters you will learn all about what skills are required and how to present yourself as hireable material. But before you can do that, you've got to be prepared. We're going to start at the very beginning, right from the moment you decide to become a temp, and explain how you go about signing up with a temp agency, how you breeze through the application process, and then how to act on the job.

The most important point I can make is that every step of the way *you must be prepared*. Before you sign up with the agency, you must have prepared beforehand so you will know what to expect and how to deal with the circumstances that arise. Later, when you go out on work assignments, you

should be prepared for that, too. For now, let's stick with the beginning.

There are a vast number of temp agencies. Some specialize in certain kinds of jobs, such as high-tech jobs, medical jobs, construction work, or manual labor. You want an agency that has lots of big business clients like AT&T, Prudential, Chubb, or any other huge companies. The bigger the better if you're on the trail of cushy jobs, since it's easier to get lost in the crowd at a big business and not do any work. Ask other people you know if temps work at their company. If you're looking to get your foot in the door of a particular company, call their human resource department and ask which temp agency they use. Or just call some of the temp agencies in the phone book and find out who their biggest clients are. You might also ask what the range of hourly wages are for administrative assistant positions.

Don't hang up the phone yet! Tell them you want to sign up to become a temp. The receptionist hears this 1,000 times a day, so she will launch right into her standard explanation of how to sign up: "We're open 8 to 5, bring two forms of ID and a résumé," she will blurt out as she slams down the phone. She's too busy to deal with you! (Don't let her rudeness put you off, they always act like that at first. I've always found them to be quite warm and helpful once I signed up with their agency.) If she doesn't tell you automatically what you need to bring and whether you need an appointment, then make a point of asking her exactly how the procedure works. There are other questions you might want to ask too, such as: Is a drug test required? What kind of skills tests? How long will the application process last? She might hang up, so you'll have to make a few calls before you extract the full story

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from her. Get the straight dope, but try not to be pesky about it.

When you go to the agency for the first time, you need to bring:

1. Two forms of ID;
2. Current résumé;
3. Pens and pencils;
4. A few sheets of paper; and,
5. Names and phone numbers of good references.

These are the keys that will get you through the door and into your first cushy, comfy, cozy temp job. Why you ask? Because —

1. *Two Forms of ID.* This is a standard. If you can't produce two forms of ID, it looks extremely suspicious, and you will have a hard time getting any job. I'm always surprised at how many people show up at employment agencies without two forms of ID. It's not just the agencies being hard-assed, this is based on the immigration laws of the United States which require employers to verify that you are who you say you are, and that you're a legal citizen of the country. Besides, if you can't show two forms of ID, you look like an incompetent loser. Why would they want to send out a loser to work for their clients' companies? If you don't have ID, you had better get some fast. Last time I signed up at an agency I used my driver's license and a badge from my previous employer. If they're dumb enough to accept a work ID, then it shouldn't be too hard to forge ID and use that, if you don't have legit ID to show.

2. *Current Résumé.* They don't always require a résumé, but you should bring one because it will help you in filling out the application, which requires you to list previous employers. Also, some long-term positions require a résumé because they only want to take you on as a temp if they think they can eventually hire you as a full-time worker. A résumé is also useful if the temp agency has a "perm division" which helps people find permanent positions. If so, you might want to sign up with the perm division as well as the temp agency on the same day. I'll share my job-winning résumé secrets with you later in the section on Going Temp to Perm.
3. and 4. *Pens, Pencils, and Sheets of Paper.* Take a few sharpened pencils with erasers, and some black or dark blue pens. The pens are for filling out the application, all the forms and paperwork. The pencils are for any written tests you are required to take. Of course they will provide pens and pencils there — the point is to present yourself as a conscientious individual. The sheets of paper are useful in case you are asked to take a math or logic test. Sometimes they don't give you scrap paper, but if you have your own it will aid immensely in working out the problems. Look how smart you are because you're planning ahead!
5. *Names and Phone Numbers of Good References.* You will have to list three or four references on the application. This is another thing that trips up a lot of people. They come to the agency ill-prepared, and of course they don't know phone numbers of previous employers or anyone who can serve as a reference. They leave those

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spaces blank on the application, and then the agency is left wondering what dark secrets are hiding in their past. The person must be pretty terrible if they can't even provide phone numbers of their references! **I can't stress this enough:** Take with you a list of names and phone numbers of contact names from previous jobs, whether temp jobs or perm.

They Want You to Lie

What if you got fired from your last job so you can't use your ex-boss as a reference? Think about other people you knew at the company. Is there anyone else whom you can put down as a reference? Even if they're not working at the company any more they can still be used as a reference. I had this problem after being fired, and it was costing me a lot of permanent jobs. I finally took action and started putting down one of my friends as my "manager" at that company. I briefed him on my job there, and made sure he had answers to all the questions an employer was likely to ask. (In exchange, I wrote my friend a letter of recommendation for business school, which he is submitting under his boss's name.) His bogus recommendation has been a blessing several times, and he loved making up stories about what a great employee I was when I worked under him! I had been too honest for too long, I realized. When I went to interviews they didn't want me to tell the truth about myself. They wanted a lie. They wanted to see me as the perfect candidate, even if I had to create fiction after fiction to accomplish that.

— Whoa, the boss just came in and handed me a paper to fax. Be right back...

— Where was I? Oh yeah, checking references. Most temp agencies are lax about checking references. If you present yourself well and score high on the skills tests, they probably won't bother calling your references at all. I've never had my references checked by temp agencies; they sent me out on jobs right away. *Good people are hard to find*, after all.

Winning Means Coming Prepared

The most important piece of advice I can give you is to come prepared to the temp agency from the very beginning. Know what you're getting yourself into by calling first, or even by sending a buddy in the day before on a reconnaissance mission to check out their policies, procedures, applications, requirements, and how lenient they are about forms of ID. And keep in mind that signing up at the agency requires filling out *lots* of forms, and revealing lots of information about yourself. You have to know the answers to their questions, so bring that information with you or you won't know what to fill in. Any spaces left blank, every mistake you make, is a mark against you. If the agency sees you are unable to even fill out the application about yourself, you'd better believe they're going to keep you away from all the good jobs.

Overcoming Executive Discrimination

In the Dilbert comic strip, cartoonist Scott Adams makes fun of executives with “good hair.” Business executives, he jokes, especially salespeople, get their jobs because they have good hair. This is no joke. This is real life. Appearances matter a great deal — no matter how unfair or discriminatory that fact may be.

June 19
Fintek, real estate
\$9/hour. Low pay but
I'm getting my book
done!

I know you're not applying to be an executive, but that doesn't matter. You have to look as much as possible like a business executive. Someone who would fit in at the company. If you don't look the part, you won't win the role.

A prime anti-example is a woman I met while temping at a nationwide bridal magazine. She looked like a crazy lady with a red polka-dot top and wild hair. She had been called in at the last minute to work reception for the place. You think they could take her seriously looking like that? She was gone the next day. Too bad, since I enjoyed talking to her and she turned out to be a vibrant and interesting personality. Her former job had been working with a rock band.

Tracy was my counselor at the first temp agency I ever signed up with. At the end of the application process she pulled me aside to one corner of the room, lowered her voice, and asked if I was looking for a full-time job. Yes, I replied. “You'll have no trouble,” she said. “In a couple of weeks

you'll have job offers. With your skills and *the way you present yourself* you will be offered jobs." I'd never thought about my "presentation" before. I was just doing what I thought was right. Then I started noticing why she said that. Other temps simply don't present themselves appropriately. They do everything wrong! And it costs them jobs. It costs them cushy jobs.

If you go in looking like a slob, you will be treated like a low-life and given lousy jobs. If you go in dressed well, you will be treated like a white-collar worker and given cushy jobs. I've seen guys walk into the temp agency wearing baseball jackets. I've seen women wearing jeans or jeans skirts. This is all wrong.

Remember, you have to make a good impression on the agency or they won't send you out on jobs. If you show them you don't know how to dress in appropriate business attire, why in the world would they send you out on business assignments? I know it's expensive to wear business clothes, but if you don't do it, you won't get any decent jobs.

Men should have a neat haircut and a clean shave. Do not wear jewelry or excessive cologne. Wear black socks. Wear dressy slacks, a button-down white shirt and a necktie. My preference is a bright tie with a small, repeated pattern. A sports jacket is optional. If you wear one, make sure it matches the pants and fits properly. Nothing looks worse than wearing a jacket with three inches of wrist exposed. If you want, buy clothes the day before your interview, wear them, then return them to the store when you're done. It's absolutely crucial that you wear this sort of standard business attire when signing up with the temp agency.

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Women have more leeway in their clothes, but the idea is the same: a neat, crisp, professional image. Most women don't have as much trouble dressing as men, but they might go overboard on the makeup, jewelry, and perfume. Nix all that. Women should also wear appropriate shoes. Don't wear sneakers or tennis shoes, saying you'll change later — you have to show the *agency* what your business image is, not your leisure image, or else they won't send you on any jobs at all.

I'll be honest: if you're a woman, or a member of a minority group, you will probably have a harder time getting good jobs than a white male. That's why it's even more critical that you dress professionally and conservatively, with your hair tucked neatly away. You should look like executive material.

Another important aspect of presentation is your attitude. Smile a lot. If you don't know how, practice in front of a mirror. Be happy. Act enthused about what you're doing. If instead you're moping around, quipping sarcastic comments about other temps, or acting depressed because you don't have a real job, those negative emotions will hurt your chances of gaining good assignments. Remember, when the agency sends you out on assignment, you become a representative of the agency. You want to show the agency that you'll be a strong representative for them. You want them to believe you're cheerful, well-mannered, kind, and a dedicated worker. (I know you're probably none of these things, but you have to pretend!)

A lot of temps strut in with a bad attitude. They're angry because they were fired or downsized. They're angry because they're getting lousy temp jobs. *They're just angry*. If you are an angry, agitated person, you have to find a way to shut that

off when you're at the temp agency, and later when you go on assignments. Anger is especially a problem if you're a woman, because you'll be seen as a bitch with a bad attitude and most executives look down on women to begin with. At one ad agency I temped at, there was a bitch (let's be honest, she was a bitch), who I found out was receiving \$2 an hour less than I was, for the same job, basically because *they didn't like her*.

I see that it's almost 5 o'clock, so it's time for me to head out the door. Before I go home for the night I want to re-stress my main points: If you want to be sent out on good jobs, you have to present yourself as someone who knows how to dress professionally, act professionally, and communicate with others professionally. You must present yourself as a good representative for the agency. You have to be a nice person. Why would the agency do anything for you if they don't even like you? Think about that — it's time for me to get my timesheet signed and walk down the street to the temp agency. See ya!

Beating The Skills Tests

One summer my twin sister needed cash. She saw how well I was doing with temping so she signed up with a temp agency. She waited and waited, but never heard from them again. Why not? She didn't have the skills.

June 20
Young & Rubicam,
ad agency, \$14/hour
AA job to one male
executive who's in
meetings all day—no
work to do!

Skills are crucial for winning good jobs. But it's not enough to have good skills. You have to prove you have them by scoring great grades on skills tests. These tests might be the old paper-and-pencil variety, or computer-based tests that allow you to show off your skills using common software packages. The

application process goes something like this:

1. First you fill out the application and other forms;
2. Then, you might be given paper and pencil tests (math, logic, English, spelling);
3. Next, you take the typing test;
4. Followed by a battery of computer tests based on the software packages you claim to know;
5. Sometimes a personality evaluation is given, which determines whether you're a nice person or an axe murderer. (Discrimination against axe murderers!);
6. Then comes the interview with your counselor; and
7. Finally, if it is required, you will be sent off to take a drug test.

Numbers 2, 3, and 4 are what they call the skills tests, which measure your ability to think mathematically, logically, understand written English instructions, use a typewriter and a computer. However, you should understand that you're really being tested every step of the way. If you don't fill out the application properly, you've flunked the Tell-Me-About-Yourself Test. If you don't interview well, you've flunked the Oral Communications Test. They're testing your skills as an effective person and worker. Be courteous and friendly to everyone you meet, including the receptionist, passersby, and other temps.

The rest of this chapter describes each of these seven testing phases and how to beat the tests. Before getting into that, I want to offer one more piece of advice.

A Friendly Reconnaissance Mission

If you've taken these kinds of tests before and it hasn't worked out, if your skills are poor, or if you're nervous about going through the procedure, then cajole a friend into going to the temp agency the day before.

Find a friend who doesn't mind embarrassing himself, who is willing to go through the application process. He might purposely choose to do poorly on the tests, so you will look even better in comparison the next day when you come in. (But that makes all the other applicants look good too, so that could backfire on you.) The main reason he's going in to the agency the day before is so he can scout out the situation, find out their policies and procedures, and discover methods of cheating on the various exams. Give him careful instructions on how he should act and what he should be looking for. Your friend should report this information back to you:

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- Did they ask any particularly difficult or weird questions on the application?
- What kinds of paper tests were given, if any? Could he steal a copy of these tests for your perusal? At the very least, he should take scrap paper and write down as many questions as possible.
- At the typing-test stage he should take note of what kind of equipment was used. Perhaps you'll be able to find duplicate equipment in a store, library, or at another office on which to practice.
- The typing test will have you typing in paragraphs from a standard sheet of boring text. Usually the text contains lots of common business terms. Usually there are many copies of the typing test laying around. Make sure your friend grabs a copy for you to study.
- When it comes time to take the computer-skills tests, he should take note of what questions are asked. Keep in mind that these tests present random questions, so the questions he got will be slightly different from the ones you will be asked. Still, there will probably be some overlap, and any information he can get for you will be useful.
- If your friend's got the computer know-how, he should take a computer disk with him to copy files onto. If the skills test is running under Windows, your friend can press Alt-Tab to switch to Windows, snoop around on their computers for the test files, and copy them over. Then you can pore over the files at your leisure.

As we continue delving into each of these components I'll offer hints and tricks to score your best on each section of the process, and also propose additional factors for your friend to

scout out as he goes through the application process for you the day before.

Be Part of a Crowd

When it's your turn to go in to the agency, try to go in during a busy time of day. The place will be crawling with wanna-be temps, and you'll have less trouble employing the cheating methods we will soon discuss.

When are the busy times? That's another thing your friend can report back to you. Or you could try calling the agency a few times and see how long it takes for them to answer the phone — then hang up, of course!

Monday morning is busiest in most of the agencies I've visited, and the days get less and less busy as the week progresses. Friday afternoon the pace picks up again as temps crowd in to pick up their paychecks and deliver timesheets. Whatever you do, don't go in on a rainy day — not only will the office be empty, but the counselors will thereafter associate your face with that depressing, gray, dreary weather.

At every typing test and skills test I've ever taken, the proctor left me alone while she went to another room, so I always had free reign to cheat however I wanted. If you're creative you can think of many ways to score an impressive victory on these tests. Think it over and carefully read the following sections as we walk through all the different parts of signing up with a temp agency. As you read, you'll see why it's so important to come in when the agency is busy — so your clever cheating methods aren't discovered.

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The Application

I always find it a grueling experience to fill out those long applications about myself. I suppose others feel the same way. One time I saw a man signing up at an agency who had brought a friend with him to help fill out the application. He could get away with that because this was at a huge city agency with a bustling waiting room filled with people. At some of the suburban agencies I've visited, the waiting area is small or non-existent, and bringing a partner to help cheat on the application process would stand out miserably and make you look like a simpleton.

Paper Tests

Sometimes they hand you paper and pencil tests on math, logic, or English, to prove you have half a brain in your head. You'll do better than most people because you walk into the place forewarned, having cleverly called the temp agency a few days before and asked them if you'll be tested on any of this stuff (or your friend found out on his secret mission). Here's my advice:

- *Bring scrap paper.* This is why I said to bring scrap paper. You'd be amazed at how stupid most people are! They try to take the math tests entirely in their head. Of course they get the answers wrong. Bring some sheets of paper so you can work out the problems and be more confident in your answers. Pack a calculator too, if you've got one. Hide it from them.
- *Practice makes pretty good.* If you know there's going to be a math test, you'd better make sure you practice long division, percentages, fractions, decimals, ratios, and solving word problems. I once tutored a friend in basic

algebra because she knew she had to take a math test for a job interview. Later she said how surprised she was that others hadn't done the same. "They just went in there without knowing anything," she said. "Of course I got the job!"

- *Fill in two holes.* Most of these paper tests are graded by hand. You fill in circles on the paper, then they grade the test by overlaying a paper template onto your answer sheet. The template has holes in it and your answers are visible through the holes. If you're having a really hard time with one question, consider circling your two best answers to the question. Only one circle will show through the hole in the template, and chances are they won't notice you cheated. If they do notice you'll have to apologize profusely and say it was an accident, you forgot to erase the other answer. I guess this could cost you your credibility (as will all of these cheating methods if you get caught), so be careful and don't overdo it. Certainly don't fill in two holes if you suspect the test will be machine-scored.

The Real Skills Tests

Now we get into the real skills tests: typing and computer software. Your best bet on these is to practice as much as possible beforehand for the tests. Most people don't. They go in blind, guess their way through the tests, and flunk. Those dummies blunder into the agency knowing that the tests will determine the course of their lives and income level over the course of the following months, and yet they do nothing for themselves to try and improve their standings with the agencies. They do nothing to prepare for the tests. Luckily

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you're smarter than that, right? If you can practice before, combined with the cheating methods I'll suggest, then you've got it made. For the following discussions I'll assume you don't have a computer at home to practice on, and limited typing and computer ability. I'll explain exactly what you need to know, and just as significantly, what you shouldn't waste your time with.

Typing Tests

Typing tests grade how fast you can type, but they also look at the accuracy with which you can type those words. 100 words per minute is terrible if you also make 100 mistakes per minute! Most typing tests begin with a short practice session so you can get to know the equipment. That is followed by the actual test, in which they hand you a few pages of notes and you are told to type in as much of it as possible in five minutes.

Typing tests can be given on typewriters or on computers. It might be a plain typewriter/computer, or it could be rigged up so you can't go back and correct mistakes. Here are the tricks:

Sneak a Peek

In a typing test you are given one sheet of notes for the practice test, and a separate sheet (or sheets) for the actual exam. Forget about the practice sheets. Concentrate fully on the actual test pages. During the practice portion you should turn the page to the actual test sheets. Use the practice time to practice taking the actual test. Look carefully at the punctuation and words used so you aren't surprised later while taking the actual test.

Slow It Down

This may be tricky, but you might be able to slow down the typing test if given on a computer. If you can slow down the computer, you will trick it into taking a longer time to count out the length of the test.

Windows 3.1 and earlier allows you to decide how much memory should be allocated to DOS programs running under Windows by going into the Settings menu. If it is a DOS program, you may be able to change the PIF file so less memory is given to that program to use. The less memory it has to use, the slower it will run. These are both tricky procedures, and require a fair amount of computer know-how. The counselor probably won't know what you're doing, but you will probably tick her off nonetheless if she catches you at it. These tricks work best if a friend scopes out the situation the day before or if you're familiar with the computer system.

Another possible way to slow the computer down is to run a lot of big programs in the background. If you can overrun the computer's memory, then it might run slower. These memory tricks depend on which operating system is in use. The newer operating systems are too smart to be fooled by them, but if it's an older OS you may be in luck.

Store for Later

Some typing tests are poorly administered which allows you to get away with murder. At one job interview they sat me down at a computer with Microsoft Word. The human resources director gave me a page of notes. "Practice on this, then call me back when you're ready to take the test," she said. I realized how easy it would be to cheat on that test! I simply used the practice period to type in as much of the page

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as possible. At the end I secretly used the computer's **Copy** command to store the text in memory. When the actual test began I used the **Paste** command to retrieve all the stored text. Thus with three minutes of practice and five minutes of test, I actually had eight minutes of test time since I retained all the text I typed during the practice session.

June 23

Young & Rubicam,
ad agency, \$14/hour. (Day
2.) Boss went on a business
trip, which means he isn't
here to hand me work.
Consequently, I plan on
getting a lot of my book
written today.

Here's how you would do this if your typing test is given in Microsoft Word for Windows, WordPerfect, or any other common IBM software package:

1. Type off the test sheet during the practice period.
2. Press **Ctrl A** to highlight all the text. (This cor-

responds to **Edit|Select All** on the menu,¹ but that would be conspicuous — you're supposed to be typing, not using the mouse.);

3. Press **Ctrl C** to copy all the text to the clipboard. (You could also select **Edit|Copy** from the menu.);
4. Press one of the arrow keys (or click the mouse button) to unselect the text. Now everything appears completely normal;
5. When the proctor comes back, she will erase the text you typed in, and will begin timing you. Little does she know that you have stored all that text in the clipboard! As soon

¹ Wondering what the | symbol means? It means select those options from the menu. For example: **Edit | Select All** means first click on the **Edit** menu, then choose **Select All** from the list. Similarly **File | New** means first choose the **File** menu, then select **New** from the menu.

as she leaves, press **Ctrl V** to paste the text back into Word. Now that you have all that text there, you can continue typing from where you left off, or you can use the extra time to correct mistakes.

By the way, after copying the text in step 3, there are a few sneaky options at your disposal. You might minimize the window, then press **Ctrl N** to create a new window. Then use **Ctrl V** to paste the text in the new window. Now when it's time to start the test, the proctor will erase the text in the new window, but you'll still have all the text stored in the old window. You just have to switch back to it. Another alternative is to store the text in the Notepad program that comes with Windows.

Disk Tricks

There are a few other alternatives if the test uses Word or WordPerfect. Instead of copying and pasting the text, you could try saving it to the hard drive during practice. Later, during the actual exam, you would retrieve the saved document. Obviously this method and the **Copy/Paste** method require you to have access to the test sheet during the practice session.

In some cases you might be able to have a friend procure the test for you ahead of time. For instance, if you have a friend go in the day before to sign up, the friend can try to make a copy of the page of notes. He might find an extra copy of it lying around, or he might be able to bring a computer disk with him. That way he can save his typing to disk, and you can bring the disk with you the next day. As soon as the proctor leaves, you whip out your disk and load in everything he typed the day before.

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Limitations

Most typing tests won't allow you to use any of these **Copy/Paste** and disk methods, because those functions have been eradicated to prevent cheating. And some typing tests are given on typewriters, so you don't have any of those fancy options available for you to cheat with. How unfortunate! In those cases your best bet is to spend a few weeks increasing your typing speed before coming into the temp agency in the first place (more on that later).

How They Try to Trick You

Believe it or not, there's a whole load of secret things they do to try to trip you up when taking a typing test. Here's what they do and how you can protect yourself from them:

- *Tricky punctuation.* The page of notes they give you is often filled with items intended to screw you up! Some sentences have semi-colons (;) instead of commas (,). Always be sure you're pressing the correct keys.
- *Progressive Difficulties.* The tests usually include a number of difficult words. I've seen tests that start easy but then begin to introduce difficult words the farther along you get into the test. Use the last 30 seconds of the practice period to scan the third or fourth paragraph for difficult words, so they don't surprise you when you come to them during the exam.
- *Intentional Mistakes.* During one practice period I noticed some of the sentences were grammatically incorrect and had misspelled words. I didn't know if this was a trick or not (did they want me to type it exactly as written, or should I make the corrections?) After doing the practice session I asked the proctor, and she said, "Type

it *exactly* as you see it.” I had my answer, but your answer might be different.

- *Tire You Out.* Remember, the practice test doesn’t count at all. It’s just there to help you learn the equipment. So *don’t tire yourself out doing it.* Sometimes people go crazy with the practice test. Then when it comes time to take the actual test, their wrists and fingers are aching, and they do poorly. You should definitely use your practice time to get acquainted with the keyboard and apply some of the cheating methods, but don’t tire yourself out!
- *Look for Grading Mistakes.* Some of the typing test computers are pretty advanced in their grading. They give a line-by-line description of everything you typed wrong. Make sure you look this over carefully for errors! In the above-mentioned case, I typed the page exactly as it was in front of me (mistakes and all). But the computer took points off for some of the mistakes! By pointing this error out to the proctor, I gained back some valuable points.
- *Business words.* The typing tests are filled with standard business words that are likely to come up frequently on the job. Be prepared for terms such as: correspondence, filing, deposition, executive, assistant, and professional.
- *Stay calm.* Don’t get all fast and frantic like a chicken running around with its head chopped off. Be mellow, relaxed, and your test scores will come out much better.

The Only Way to Learn Typing

I happen to be a very good typist, but I didn’t get that way from typing classes. I learned to type because I type a lot. The more I typed, the better I got. You can do the same. You don’t have to waste your money on typing classes if your

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goal is merely to type fast. All you have to do is practice, practice, practice. Don't worry about typing "the right way" or following the rules. Just worry about practicing a little bit each day.

How can you practice typing? The best way is to find a keyboard and type sentences on it. The more you type, the better you'll get. You can practice in computer stores, on library computers, or on a cheap typewriter you pick up at a garage sale. You don't even have to leave your home, for I'm providing you with your very own keyboard in this very book. If you just practice a little bit each day, you will see your typing skills improving rapidly.

Keyboarding and Data Entry Tests

If you're like me, you just *adore* carpal tunnel syndrome. That's why you can't wait to sign up for some exciting data entry jobs. Think of it: the glamour of tedious stacks of insurance forms! The thrill of the paper cuts! The glare of the computer screen! If all this sounds like one roller-coaster ride of phun, then let me offer the few hints I can on passing the keypad and data entry tests.

(I offer only a few hints on these because you *do not* want these jobs unless absolutely forced into it. Even then, only do it as a personal favor to your temp counselor. Tell her that. Say it in the cheerful, positive, professional voice you reserve for such occasions when you really feel like punching her in the face: "It sounds like you're in a bind, Susan. I know you always do your best to help me get the best jobs when they're available, so sure I'll help you out with this today!")



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Notice the word “today.” Anything longer than a day is inhuman. These torturous jobs sap your vital life-force, human creativity, and your spirit. It’s handy if you can score a fantastic score on the keyboarding tests because it further clinches your image as a wonderfully talented, multi-skilled worker whom the agency will love to farm out on the best assignments. But hopefully you won’t actually be taking a lot of these jobs. Save them for the people who don’t do as well on the computer tests as you.

Here’s how these tests work. You are given a booklet containing page after page of forms. The forms are “name and address” forms containing fake information about fictional people. On the computer screen is the same form. It’s your job to type in the data as quickly and correctly as possible. Then press the **Next** button or **OK** button to save it. The form clears, you turn the page, and go on to the next form. You’ll have around 7 to 10 minutes to type in as many forms as possible.

- *Don’t choke up.* You’re not expected to type all two hundred and fifty forms into the computer. No one gets through all of it. They purposely give you a lot more than is humanly possible, in order to scare you.
- *Get comfortable.* Before the test starts, adjust the monitor so there’s no glare. Put on your glasses if you have to. Move the booklet to a position where you can easily see and read it. Move the keyboard into an accessible location. Loosen up, and shake out your hands before you start. It’s amazing how many people suffer through all these skills tests, never bothering to even move the keyboard to where they can reach it.

- *Go slow at first, then speed up.* For the first few forms you type in, go slowly and carefully to get a feel for the program. You'll prevent common mistakes like typing in the hyphen in a phone number when the program puts it in automatically for you. Also notice that sometimes you have to press the Tab key to move to the next field, while other times it will advance to the next field for you. A five-digit code number should advance automatically because when you type in the fifth digit it knows there's nothing else to enter. But a name or address can be any length, so you'll have to press Tab yourself to continue. After the first couple of forms you'll get the hang of the pattern and can then go faster.
- *One final look-see.* Just try to be as accurate as possible. Give the form one final look before pressing **Next**. That way you'll catch yourself if you accidentally typed the person's name in the ZIP code field or some other blunder.
- *Don't use the mouse.* It may be your habit to use the mouse to click in the individual fields, but this is a timed test and the mouse will slow you down. Don't use it. Keep your fingers on the keyboard, and press Tab to advance to the next field. When you're done with the form, press Enter to save the data and go on to the next form.
- *Do two things at once.* Save time by doubling up your actions. While giving the form your final look-over, turn the page of the booklet with the other hand. Doing two things at once will save valuable seconds which can be used for inputting more data.

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The Mouse

Any computer nowadays relies on a mouse for input, so you'd better be comfortable using one. The best way to become familiar with the mouse is to go to a computer store, find a computer set up with the Solitaire game, and start playing it. That's really one of the reasons Windows comes equipped with Solitaire, because it's an easy and fun way to learn to use the mouse. You should know how to do the basic mouse actions: move the cursor, click, double-click, click-and-drag. As long as you're unable to use a mouse you will be behind the times and will find it nearly impossible to learn to use any software. After typing, the mouse should be your first priority.

Windows

Very rarely are you given a Windows test, but sometimes you are. It's helpful to be prepared for it. Generally it's fairly simple, and mainly amounts to being able to click, double-click, and drag the mouse. If you know how to do the following tasks you'll be fine:

- Click a button, choose a menu item, type text in an edit field, and all the other usual stuff you do in Windows.
- Run a program by double-clicking.
- Delete a file by dragging it to the Recycle Bin.
- Maximize a window.
- Restore a minimized window.
- Scroll around in a window using scrollbars.
- Resize a window to make it larger or smaller.
- Draw a box around several items to select them, and then move the selected items.

- Right-click with the mouse to display a menu, then select options from the menu.

If you need help learning any of these basic Windows functions, just go to Sears, OfficeMax, or some other store that sells computers. Find a computer with Windows to practice on, and play around with it until you're comfortable performing those tasks.

Computer Software

You will be asked what business software you're familiar with, and then you will be tested on them. The test might be a multiple-choice paper exam, or it might be a computerized test. Most agencies have switched to the computerized tests by now. There are two kinds of computerized tests. The worst kind is a multiple-choice

test given on the computer. The best kind is a computerized test where you're actually inside the software application that you're being tested on. A question appears on screen ("Please print out the first 5 pages of this document.") and then you navigate through the program to answer the question. This is the best kind of test because the software is right there in front of you.

However, even the best of these tests are pretty terrible. The counselors who work at temp agencies hear excuses all day long:

"That test is stupid! I'm better than that."

June 24
Health Care Center,
\$14/hour. So far today
my only job has been to
file a stack of papers
they said has been sitting
around for a month. It
took 10 minutes.

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"The computer messed me up! I know how to use the real thing if you just give me a chance!"

It's true that usually the skills tests are unfair and stupid, and that they don't do an accurate job of testing your skills. I've encountered all sorts of loopy phenomena which negatively affected my score:

- bugs in the testing software;
- wrong instructions from the counselor;
- limited testing software that doesn't allow you to use the software the way you're used to using it;
- rooms full of jabbering temps and dot matrix printers noisily machine-gunning out score reports, so that I couldn't hear myself think; or
- broken mouse or computer keyboard

All this is extremely frustrating, especially if you're a whiz at using the software. For instance, when I use Microsoft Word I like to use the keyboard shortcuts to breeze through the program. However, when they test you on Word, often they force you to make selections from the toolbars, which I almost never use. This is silly, of course, because if you were really using Word, you would have the option of making selections however you like. However the testing software is limited by the programmers who created it, so you can be an expert and still wind up with a lousy score.

The computerized test starts with a few introductory screens that allow you to familiarize yourself with the setup. Try out the mouse and keyboard at the earliest opportunity and make sure they work properly. You don't want your test scores skewed because of a broken mouse ball. If there's a

problem, complain nicely and ask to be seated at a different computer.

If the room sounds like a battlefield, you may be able to wait until it quiets down, or ask politely for the other temps to hush. Remember: always polite, always gentle. Always exercise your professional image.

One helpful thing about computerized skills tests is that generally you find out how you're doing as you take the test. If you give it a wrong answer, it razzes you and sometimes gives you another shot at getting it right. *Read the instructions carefully.* The instructions are usually given in the opening screens, but there may be printed material too. Most people are stupid: they don't read the instructions. One time I was taking these skills tests at a cattle-call job interview, and I noticed the guy next to me diligently typing all his personal information into the computer. *Ha ha*, I chuckled to myself, for I had read the instructions and knew I didn't have to waste my time on that screen. He was eating up precious time, and I'm sure it didn't help him get the job when the interviewer came over and chastised him about it. (P.S., I was offered the job, but then they informed me the pay had been cut and I'd have to work weekends. Screw that!)

I highly recommend that you put in a few study sessions before going in to take the tests. (Actually, I recommend you have your friend infiltrate the agency the day before, take careful notes on the test questions, or steal a copy if it's a paper test, *and then* study for the exams.) Whether or not you have a friend who can do that for you, it's best to learn and study as much on your own as you can.

This is what you have to know to pass the skills tests:

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Need to Know (in order of importance)

1. Microsoft Word
2. Microsoft Excel
3. Microsoft PowerPoint
4. Windows

Not so Important

WordPerfect
Lotus 1-2-3 or
other spread-
sheets.
Macintosh

Only if Agency Offers Specialty Jobs

Microsoft Access
Quark
Other page-layout software

Don't Bother With

AmiPro
Q&A
Anything else

More than anything else you need to know Microsoft Word. If you don't know Word you won't get many good jobs. Or any jobs. Second, you need to know Microsoft Excel. Those two are enough to learn for now. Once you've got them down cold, you'll start getting some good office jobs where you'll have plenty of free time in which to play around with the office computers. Use your free time to further refine your Word/Excel skills, but also to learn PowerPoint and Windows. If you want to go for extra bucks, you can start learning Quark or other page-layout software, but most offices don't have that kind of software, so I don't know where you'll find a copy of it to play with.

It's true that there are *some jobs* that require Mac knowledge. There are *some jobs* that require WordPerfect, or Lotus, or FoxPro or Access. But the *majority of cushy, easy temp jobs require Microsoft Word*. It's imperative that you pass the Word skills test. It's second-most-important to pass the Excel test. Everything else is gravy on the cake.

So what do I mean when I say you “need to know Word”? Well, you need to know at least enough to pass the skills tests. You have to be able to:

- Create a new document.
- Open a document, save it, and print it out.
- Type and erase text.
- Copy and paste text using the menus and toolbars.
- Select fonts, point size, boldface, underline, and italics.
- Left align, center, right align, and justify text using the toolbar.
- Create a bulleted list and numbered list of items. (If you don’t know what a bulleted list is, look at those black squares at the beginning of these sentences.)
- Run a spellcheck. (Press the function key **F7**, or select **Tools | Spelling** from the menu.)
- Insert a page break in the document. (Select **Insert | Break** from the menu, then make sure **Page Break** is selected and hit **OK**.)
- Insert page numbers. (Select **Insert | Page Numbers** from the menu.)
- Set margins using the Ruler and mouse.
- Set tab stops using the Ruler and the **Format | Tabs** menu.
- Use the **Go To** feature to jump to special points in the document.
- Edit footnotes, headers and footer text. (And know the difference between a footnote and a footer.)
- Be familiar with the different ways of viewing a document on the **View** menu.
- Be familiar with **File | Page Setup**.

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You should learn how to select these options using both menus and toolbars when appropriate, because you never know how they'll test you. (By the way, these same basic skills also apply if you're going to take the WordPerfect test, although the control keys and menus might be different.)

General Hints

Before going into the other software I want to offer some general advice that will help you on the skills tests. Microsoft software (Word, Excel, PowerPoint) all follow the same format. A menu at the top offers these choices:

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Table Window Help

The menu is slightly different in each program, but these core choices remain the same. These categories help organize the software, and you should use them to help you answer questions on the skills test. For example, if you are asked how to insert a picture into a Word document, your brain should go *Bingo! That's an Insert question! I use the Insert menu!*

The **File** menu holds all the file-related stuff (opening files, saving files, creating a new file, printing a file, and seeing what the file will look like when printed out).

The **Edit** menu holds all the text-editing stuff (cutting and pasting text, copying text, find and replace).

The **View** menu holds all the choices for what you look at on the computer monitor (toolbars, rulers, zooming in and out, and different ways of displaying the pages on-screen).

Hint: The **View** menu is only about what *you* see on *your* screen. It has nothing to do with what the document will look like when it gets printed out.

The **Insert** menu lets you insert all sorts of different things into the document (page breaks, page numbers, pictures, clip art, files).

The **Format** menu is probably *the most important piece of the menus for the skills tests*. This is where all the fancy stuff is. If you want to choose distinctive fonts, custom styles, line borders and shading, this is where you'll find it. Any question that asks how to customize or change options for an item on screen, is probably a **Format** question, because it's asking you how to format the object.

The **Tools** menu is a toolbox of handy utilities, like spell-checking, thesaurus, mail-merge, auto-correction, and specialty features. Because the features here are so particular, they are not often mentioned on the skills tests (except for the occasional spell-checking or thesaurus question).

Window and **Help** are standard menus that appear in almost every Windows program. For that reason they are usually not tested on the skills tests. (The skills tests measure your skills in using the software in particular, not Windows in general.) **Window** allows you to create a new window in which to edit documents. It also has various features for arranging windows on-screen. There is nothing there that affects how the document will look when it prints out. There is nothing there to affect the shape or size of the page, or anything at all about the document. Therefore, you should almost *never* have any reason to select **Window** as an answer on a skills test, unless you're taking the Windows 3.1 or Windows 95 skills test. Similarly, the **Help** menu appears in most Windows programs, and its function is to contain the help files about the application you are using (duh). You will almost never be tested on help functions on the skills tests.

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On the other hand, the Microsoft Standard Toolbar is very important to know for the skills tests. The Standard Toolbar is a row of buttons that can be found in most Microsoft software, such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. (Often one of the test questions is how to display the Standard Toolbar, or a different toolbar which they name. The answer is to select the menu item **View | Toolbars.**)

The Standard Toolbar contains these important buttons shown below. (For copyright reasons the button designs have been slightly altered. Also, please note that similar designs are used in many different pieces of software, so it's useful to know them for any software test you might take.)



The first button on the left looks like a white piece of paper. Press it to start a new document. (This is the same as selecting File | New from the menu, or pressing **Ctrl N** on the keyboard.)

You have to know all this, so read carefully and make a cheat sheet if necessary!



The second button from the left looks like a yellow folder opening up.

Press it to open a file stored on disk. (This is the same as selecting **File | Open** from the menu, or pressing **Ctrl O** on the keyboard.)



The third button from the left looks like a computer disk. Press it to save the current file to disk. (This is the same as selecting **File | Save** from the menu, or pressing **Ctrl S** on the keyboard.)



The fourth button from the left looks like a little printer. Press it to print out the document. (This is the same as selecting **File | Print** from the menu, or pressing **Ctrl P** on the keyboard.)

You almost definitely will need to know some or all of these four buttons if you take any of the skills tests. You might also need to know the toolbar buttons for Cut, Copy, and Paste. These buttons are also on the Standard Toolbar.

The Cut button looks like a pair of scissors. First use the mouse to select some text. The Cut button cuts the text out of the document completely. It can be replaced at a different location in the document (or in a new document) by pressing the Paste button (which looks like a clipboard with a paper in front of it). The copy button looks like two little white pieces

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of paper next to each other. It is used to make a copy of the text or object that is selected on screen. After pressing the Copy button, reposition the cursor and then press Paste to put the copy of the object in place.



The last two buttons you need to know about on the Standard Toolbar are Undo and Redo. Undo un-does your last action when you click on the curly arrow pointing left. (This is the same as pressing **Ctrl Z** or selecting **Edit | Undo** from the menu.) If you change your mind after undoing something, press the Redo button, which is the right-pointing curly arrow. If you press the black triangle-arrow pointing down, a list of your previous edits up to now is presented for you to undo or redo. Finally, if you ever want to repeat an action you've just done, select **Edit | Repeat** from the menu or press **Ctrl Y**.



This is all basic stuff, but it's exactly the kind of thing they test you on in the skills tests. If you don't know it, you'd better start learning it. Play with the software until you're comfortable with these concepts. If you know only one way of accessing these functions, you'd better start learning alternative methods. For instance, if you only know how to open

files by using the menu, you have to learn to use the toolbar too. If you only Cut & Paste with the toolbar, familiarize yourself with the menu system. The skills tests ask very specific questions, and they often don't allow much leeway in your responses.

Read the Question Carefully

Read the question carefully before responding. Typically the question will advise you on *one particular method* of answering the question. Here are some examples:

- “*Open the file BITEME.DOC using the toolbar.*” Upon seeing the words “Open the file,” many applicants jump to the **File** menu to open the document. But wait, there's more! Read the whole question carefully and you'll see you're being specifically asked to open the file using the toolbar. Anything else is a wrong answer.
- “*Spell check the document. Use the keyboard shortcut.*” Same thing. You're so happy to see a question you know how to do, that you rush to select **Tools | Spelling** from the menu, without noticing that it's really asking you to press **F7**.
- “*Change the point size of the highlighted text.*” In this question it does not specify how the task is to be accomplished. You could use the menu (**Format | Font**) or toolbar. Do whatever is quickest for you, and whatever you're most familiar with. That doesn't mean the stupid testing program will let you get away with that. Remember, most of these programs are very limited, and they might not have all options built into them. You might get razzed for choosing the menu, because only the toolbar is

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built into the testing software. You might even get points taken off your score. If it doesn't let you answer the question the way you know, try answering it the other way. But also keep careful record of exactly which answers didn't work. That way you'll be prepared if you have to retake the test. And that way you can complain to your counselor and clearly explain exactly why you'd like to throw that testing software into the ocean.

June 25
AT&T,
\$10.25/hour.
Free lunches galore!
I'm packing them
away for the rest of
the week.

The more advanced computerized tests produce a report that shows not only what you got right and wrong, but also goes down to the bare bones of how you answered each question. It might say you answered 5% of the questions using the keyboard, 70% using menus, and 25% with the toolbar buttons. I was horrified the first time I saw this because in a way

it negated the high score I'd received on the test. It was mocking me! *"Ha ha, so what you got a high score on the test! Only 5% of your answers used the keyboard shortcuts! Most of the time you used the long-winded menu answer! You're not so hot now, are you?!"* I was slightly pissed until I found that the counselors didn't even look at those percentages. All they cared about was the final score, whether it was a high score or a low score. It doesn't even matter where you scored well and where you scored poorly. When I took the PowerPoint test, I got a low score on the easy questions, but a 95% in the hardest questions on the test! Obviously there was something wrong with the test, but the temp agency was too stupid to realize that. I had the same

problem with Excel. Whenever my counselor would send me out on an Excel assignment, she would say, “Tsk, tsk, your Excel scores aren’t that good.” I’d tell her, “Melissa! The test is lousy! Look how great I did on all the hard questions! Obviously I know the easy questions, it’s just that the test isn’t fair.” Somehow this obvious information never penetrated her skull, and it was only when I retook the tests that she finally believed I was proficient in those other programs. Even then I would hear from her the condescending, “You’ve improved so much!” And I would reply: “I’ve always been great, only now I’ve learned how to beat your stupid tests.”

Double Up

Most of the agencies have their own testing rooms off to the side for administering the skills tests. Away from their watchful eyes you can work your deceptions, especially if they have multiple computers in the room. No one else in there with you? See if you can run the testing program on another computer as you take the test. Before responding to a question, test out your answer on the other computer. If you bungle an answer there, you know it’s no good for your own test. What if other temps are suffering through the tests in the room with you? Perhaps you can peek over their shoulders or — even better — see if they’re up to sharing answers with you.

Your Friend Again

One more tactic to consider, if you have a friend who’s really good at typing and computer skills, is to have your friend sneak into the testing room and take the tests for you.

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This is not as outlandish as it sounds. Many temp agencies, especially big-city agencies, are flooded with people in the waiting rooms and everywhere. No one can keep track of who everyone is, why they're there, and where they're supposed to be. Furthermore, there's really almost no security precautions taken with the skills tests, at least none that I've ever seen, so if your friend is along, wait until the counselor leaves the room, and have your friend slip into place behind the computer.

Fudge a Printout

One final cheating method before going into the banal how-to's of Excel and PowerPoint. At the end of the skills tests you get a printout of how well you scored. You might be able to somehow fudge the printouts to your advantage. For instance, a few days before your test you might Dumpster-dive the agency and find examples of the printouts. Or if your friend went in the day before, he might be able to find a loose printout to bring home. If you find the printouts of a high-scorer, you might be able to smuggle in those pages and put them in the printer at the end of your test. Make sure there are no names or code numbers on the printout, though! If there is a name, perhaps you can forge your own printout using it as a guide. Substitute your own name, change the date and time to reflect when you'll be going in to the agency, and then take these pages with you. Most temp agencies don't do anything to prevent cheating on skills tests, so you should be able to get away with it. Even if you can't forge your own score report, it can still be helpful to read through the reports you find in the trash (or recycling bin). Often the reports go into great detail about the skills that are tested.

You can get an idea about which areas you need to learn more about, and maybe even see if there are certain questions that most applicants screw up. You might even find examples of the typing tests in the trash. Look at those and study them for difficult words. Practice typing and retyping those tests until you've got them down cold.

Excel

Excel is one of these boring spreadsheet programs in which accountants and other slimy types do what is known as “number crunching.” I’ve never heard a number crunch, but I’ve used Excel and it’s not as scary as it seems at first glance. Basically, all it is, is a bunch of rectangles. In each rectangle (or “cell”) you can place a number, or some words to describe those numbers. You can make neat rows and columns of numbers, and then add them together to get a grand total, average them together, or perform other functions with them.

For Excel it is crucial that you learn the **Format | Cells** menu item. This menu item is where you select all the fancy options for cells, including fonts, borders, shading, height and width, and how numbers display in cells in the spreadsheet. You will most likely be given several questions on this portion of Excel, so learn it well. You will also be tested on the basics of opening a spreadsheet, saving a spreadsheet, and printing out. You also have to know how to:

- Type and delete info from a cell.
- Highlight a range of cells using the mouse.
- Print a range of cells. (Highlight those cells, then select **File | Print**, press the **Selection** button, then hit **OK**.)

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- Go to a particular cell. (Select **Edit | Go To** or press **Ctrl G**.)
- Use the **SUM** function to add numbers together.

Examples:

<code>=SUM(A1:E1)</code>	adds all the cells from A1 through E1.
<code>=SUM(A1,E1)</code>	adds cell A1 to E1.
<code>=PRODUCT(A1:E1)</code>	multiplies all the cells from A1 through E1.
<code>=PRODUCT(A1,E1)</code>	multiplies cell A1 with E1.
<code>=AVERAGE(A1,B1,C1)</code>	takes the average of cells A1, B1 and C1.

- Insert a blank row or column into the spreadsheet. (Note that **Insert | Rows** places the new row *above* where the cursor is. **Insert | Columns** places the new column to the left of the cursor.)
- Change the width of columns (for instance to make them all the same width). (Select **Format | Column | Width**, then type the width you desire.)
- Insert a chart. (Select **Insert | Chart** and then select **On This Sheet** or **As New Sheet**, depending on what the question asks.)
- Sorting data using the **Data | Sort** menu item.

PowerPoint

PowerPoint helps mindless executives create boring presentations to help them sell their unnecessary products and ideas to zombie consumers on spending frenzies. Each page of the presentation is called a “slide” because the executives can project their slides on the wall like a slide show. They can use special fonts, colors, graphics, charts and graphs in their presentations, which no matter how much of this stuff they throw in, will still put everyone to sleep. Still, it’s useful for your career as a temp to know PowerPoint, after you’ve mastered Word and Excel. In particular you should know how to:

- Create a new presentation based on a template.
- Save a presentation to disk.
- Insert pictures from a Clip Art Gallery. (**Insert | ClipArt**).
- Add a new slide to the presentation. (**Insert | New Slide**).
- Reorder slides using the Slide Sorter view. (Select **View | Slide Sorter** then drag the slide to the new position.)
- Insert and edit text on a slide. (On the Drawing Toolbar, click the **A** button. Then you can draw a text box on the slide with the mouse. Text can be typed into the text box.)
- Insert a graph on a slide. (Select **Insert | Microsoft Graph**. A mini spreadsheet and sample chart will appear. Type data into the spreadsheet and it will appear on the chart.)
- Promote and demote bullets in a bulleted list. (There are two toolbar buttons that look like arrows, which are used to indent bulleted lists of items left or right.)
- Start a slide show. (Select **View | Slide Show** from the menu.)
- Print out a presentation or individual slides. (Select **File | Print** or press **Ctrl P**. If you wish to print particular slides, type the number of those slides where it says **Slides**.)
- Change the background of the presentation. Select **Format | Custom Background**. (Also notice **Format | Apply Design Template** which applies a particular template to all slides in a slideshow. And **Format | Slide Layout**, which allows you to add new elements to a slide.)

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Software packages such as PowerPoint, Excel, and Word are so immensely huge that it's hard to know how to learn them. Well, now you know. Learn the things I've listed here and you'll score high — a lot higher than those dolts who came in with no preparation at all. Please keep in mind that these are only some of the many questions that they can ask on the skills tests. The questions I've listed here are the ones I've seen many times on the tests, and you should at the very least know how to answer them. Go to a library or book store and look up the answers in computer books. Study the screenshots so you know what the software looks like. The best thing is to find computers to practice on. Make a cheat sheet if necessary, but make sure you are able to answer them for the tests.

Anything Else?

If you want to learn other software, it's up to you. You're unlikely to be tested on it, and you probably don't have to really learn it anyway. I've been sent on Macintosh jobs, Lotus 1-2-3 jobs, WordPerfect jobs, and FoxPro jobs, without ever having taken any tests on those programs. I don't even know if they *make* tests for that stuff! The key is to impress the agency with your skills in the basic areas: typing, Word, Excel, and the way you dress, speak, and act (PowerPoint a plus). If you do those things well, they'll let the rest slide. They'll trust you to do a good job and you won't have to prove yourself on the tests anymore.

If Your Scores Should be Flushed

Whadda ya do if after all this tireless devotion to cheating, your test scores still place you squarely on the scale between a monkey and Bozo the Clown?

You'll never get great temp jobs if your scores aren't stellar. As you're sitting there failing the test, take note of the problems you're having. If it asks about a particular toolbar or menu, keep in mind there are probably other questions on the same toolbar or menu that may show up the next time you take the test. You should have plenty of time to take the test and scribble notes to yourself, as they usually give you a lot more time than necessary to complete the exam.

Take whatever jobs they'll give you with your paltry test scores, and take charge of your future by teaching yourself the software on the job. Do everything you can to learn more about the software. Start with your trouble spots and the lists I've provided above, and once you've mastered those skills, go on to learn whatever else interests you. Temp agencies are always offering free classes in skill improvement. Or maybe they'll let you come in and use their computers to practice, practice, practice. When you know for sure you've mastered the skills, confidently walk up to your counselor and inform her you've been studying hard and would like to strut your stuff. She'll re-administer the tests and you'll blow her away this time. Guess you're not such a Bozo after all, huh?

June 26
AT&T, \$10.25/hour.
(Day 2.) Learned how
to use the office
supply catalog. Will
receive personal
shipment of stuff
tomorrow.

You Are Nice, Right?

After the computer skills tests you might be given a psychological personality test, and you will definitely be interviewed by one of the counselors. There's not much to say

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about these two aspects except: Be Nice. For the interview you should do as I've said before and will say again — show that you are confident, enthused, executive material. The psychology test is so obvious in its intent that you really have to be a dedicated psychopath to flunk it. They ask questions like: "Do you feel it's all right to take supplies from the office because the company owes you?" (Answer: No, it's not all right.) "How long does it take you to recover from an argument?" (Answer: Not too long.) "Have you ever told a little white lie?" (Answer: Yes, of course you have. If you answer No, they'll know you're lying!) "Do you enjoy meeting new people and learning new things?" (Answer: Yes.) You see how easy this is. The key is *not to be yourself*. Answer the questions the way they want them answered. Don't get suckered into answering the way you really feel, because undoubtedly you have more in common with an axe murderer than the dedicated worker they're looking for.

Drug Tests

Drug tests are invasive and pointless. They're also not too hard to beat. That is, they're not hard to beat when you know in advance you're gonna get one. Drug tests are usually administered ASAP, within 48 or 72 hours, because they don't want to give the drugs enough time to leave the victim's system. Remember that whole chapter about calling the agency and preparing yourself? You were smart enough to call ahead and find out exactly what's required of you, or you sent a buddy the day before, and so you found out that a drug test was required. Now that you know a drug test is required, you merely have to stay off drugs for the next couple of weeks, *and then* go down to the agency and sign up. (Pot can be de-

tected in your urine as long as a month later, sometimes longer.)

If for some reason you didn't call the agency two weeks ago, and now you're faced with taking a drug test immediately with drugs in your system, you can still probably beat the test. You'll have to bring a container of someone else's urine with you (lovely, I know). Keep it toasty warm. The first thing they do after you piss in it, is stick a thermometer into it to make sure your piss is between 90.5°F and 99.8°F. If it's cooler than that, they suspect you've faked the piss, which you probably have, you creep you.

Recently I've taken two piss tests, and in spite of all the security precautions they would have been pretty easy to beat even if I'd had drugs in my system. But it's all about getting knowledge beforehand as to what kind of test is being administered.

At my first drug test I had to wait in a waiting room for ten minutes, then was led into a laboratory that contained metal storage lockers. I was told to empty my pockets into a locker. Everything, even tissues, had to go in. They locked the locker and handed me the key. Then the nurse led me to the bathroom where I was to piss into a cup. The toilet had blue stuff in the water to prevent me from diluting my piss or filling the cup with toilet water. The sink had been made inoperable, and there was a cardboard signed taped on top of it: "DON'T USE SINK." After I pissed into the cup, I had to pour it into a plastic container and seal it. The nurse held open a plastic bag into which I dropped the plastic container. She took my urine's temperature (do they use an oral or rectal thermometer for that?). I unlocked the locker, took back my stuff, and that was it.

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I didn't feel too violated by this procedure. It was kind of funny, actually. If I'd known beforehand what the test involved I could have easily concealed a bag of clean piss on my body, under my pants or T-shirt. The trick would be keeping it warmed up to the necessary temperature. Perhaps it's possible to purchase heating pads from an outdoor supply store for the purpose?

The second drug test was terribly invasive. After waiting for 15 minutes I was brought to an examining area where I had to take off my shoes and socks, and all my clothes except for my underwear. I was given a little white hospital gown to put on. The nurse came back and handed me a frayed purple bathrobe that would have been too small on a midget. I had to walk down a cold hallway to the bathroom, where I was to piss into the cup. The nurse waited outside the door. When I was done, I handed her the cup and she *carefully* walked back to the examining room with the cup of delicious urine. It was like the slowest one-person relay race you've ever seen. She told me the rule was that I had to be in the same room as she was when she poured the urine into the container. I felt honored. She stood over a sink as she poured my piss from the cup into the plastic container. I stood behind her and slipped back into my clothes. She took its temperature, I signed the paperwork, and skidadled out of there.

This time it didn't feel like a joke. This time I felt genuinely pissed at the whole procedure! What an outrageous invasion of privacy to be forced to strip down and parade through a hallway like a prisoner. Still, upon reflection, I realized that even this urine test could have been beaten by someone with sufficient forewarning. First of all, anyone could have walked into the bathroom before me, hidden behind the door, and

supplied his piss fresh from the source. (If you can find a friend to do all this stuff for you, you're indebted to him for life!) I suppose the stripping of the clothes was to prevent me from concealing bottles of pee-pee on my body, but even stripping near naked couldn't have stopped that. After all, I could have easily hidden a container under the white hospital gown, or under the purple bathrobe. It might be conspicuous under close scrutiny, but the nurse was so embarrassed by the whole thing she made sure not to even glance my way the whole time. Even when she handed me the purple bathrobe she stuck her arm through a crack in the door.

If you ever do have to take a drug test, my best advice is that you should have been thinking ahead and predicted it, and gotten yourself drug-free in the interim. It may also help to drink several truckloads of fluids during the hours or days leading up to the drug test, and then piss it out before you go, thus diluting and cleansing your system. Drinking copious amounts of goldenseal tea is also helpful. Barring that, try to find out as much about the lab as possible beforehand so you'll know what can be done to beat the test. Entire books have been written on the subject of beating urine tests, and information proliferates on the Internet. One great source of data is

www.csun.edu/~hbcsc096/dt

Your Plan of Action

Now that you've read all about how to sign up with the agency, including presenting yourself and beating the tests, here's the plan of action you need to follow:

1. Master your typing skills;
2. Practice using the mouse in a Windows environment;

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3. Learn about Microsoft Word. If time allows, learn Excel and PowerPoint;
4. Call some temp agencies, find out information about them;
5. If a drug test is required, wait a few weeks or send a buddy in to see if the test can be beaten;
6. If possible, have a friend scout out the agency. Dumpster-dive for data. Use all this to your advantage. Prepare cheat sheets, computer disks, and fake printouts;
7. Go in dressed and groomed professionally, and with all the information about yourself you'll need to fill out the forms, including references, phones, names and addresses;
8. Remember to smile, act polite, and show that you're a confident person whom they will feel comfortable sending out on assignments;
9. That's it! You've beaten the tests and impressed the hell out of them!

Landing Cushy Jobs

After all that you're on your way to the cushy jobs! *Yee haw!* No more pushing mops and carts for you! Now it's just sitting back in air-conditioned offices and working on your personal projects on company time! Temp agencies have three methods of assigning jobs:

Job Assigning Method #1

Don't Call Us, We'll Call You

When I first started temping, the agency would call me at home and offer me a job, usually for the next day or following week. I would accept or decline it. It was all very leisurely. Suburban areas are most likely to use this method, since they don't have as many jobs to go around as in the city, and the jobs they do have are all spread out geographically.

June 27
AT&T, \$10.25/hour.
(Day 3.) Office supply
shipment arrived.
Separated out the
legitimate buys from
my own private
stockpile. I love
temping.

What if the agency says they'll call you, but they don't? Be assertive. Call them. Ask if anything's available. There were times when I wasn't receiving job offers, and when I finally called the agency, my counselor asked, "Oh you're done with your last assignment? I didn't know!" And she sent me out immediately.

If you've shown the agency you're a *good person*, then you can expect to get called at home with assignment offers. Tell

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your counselor if this is what you want. **Problem:** If the agency calls your home and there's no answer, the job goes to someone else. **Solution:** Get an answering machine, and listen to it often. Or have the agency call your beeper number. Remember, temp jobs are on a first-come, first-serve basis. You want to show the agency that when they call you first, you respond fast and take the job. Make their lives easier and you bring more jobs—better jobs—to you.

Job Assigning Method #2

Waiting Standby

More recently I've switched to standby jobs. This means every morning I wake up extra-early, go over to the temp agency, and sit in the waiting room along with dozens of other temps, where we wait for our names to be called. Every day (or every couple of days) I get sent on a new assignment. This arrangement works for me now because I don't want to get bogged down in a long-term assignment. I'm searching for a "real job," so taking these one-day jobbers allows me the freedom to take days off to go on job interviews. Here's my advice on temping stand-by:

- *Announce yourself.* Autograph the sign-in sheet as soon as you walk into the agency. Usually I try to be the first job-seeker arriving the morning, so I get my name at the top of the list. Every so often one of the counselors takes the sheet, photocopies it, and distributes copies to all the counselors. That way they know exactly who's sitting out there in the lobby. If your name isn't on the list, they'll never know you're there and you won't get called for a job. Several times I've rushed into the temp agency just as a counselor was heading to the copier with the sign-in

sheet. "Wait!" I've called out. "Let me add my name to the list!" You gotta do what you gotta do.

- *Be assertive.* My first day at one agency I was the first one in, and had signed my name first on the list. After waiting 15 minutes, another temp strode out of the elevator, marched into the back room, and headed straight for my counselor's desk! Within a minute I saw that temp fly out the door with her assignment card in hand. I was furious! But I saw then how it was: it didn't matter what the rules were. This was war—and in wars the rules are routinely broken. From then on I would come in each morning and go straight to my counselor's desk, sit down in the chair beside her, and hear what jobs she had to offer.
- *Don't bother them.* Let me amend that piece of advice. You can only get away with assertive (obnoxious?) behavior like that if your skills are fabulous and your personality is charming. Prove yourself to them as an efficient and skilled worker first, and even then don't overdo the assertiveness, as it will only count against you in the long run.
- *Take the first job.* If you have mastered the skills tests then your counselors will look out for you. They will save the best jobs for you, because they know that you, and you alone, can handle them. They *want* you to get the best jobs because you are their star temp, and they want to provide the company with the best that they have to offer. For that reason, you should almost always take the first job offered you, because undoubtedly it is the best one. It seems like every temp I've talked to while waiting stand-by has a story about turning down a job and then

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not getting any other offers that day or the rest of the week. If you take what they offer you, you're doing them a favor, and they will appreciate it. If you turn down the job, you're creating more work for them as well as hurting your chances of getting work in the future. After all, why should they offer jobs to you if you're just going to reject them? They'll turn to me instead because they know I look out for them, the way they look out for me. In short: if you're looking for a job, and they offer you one, take it!

Job Assigning Method #3

The Résumé Selection Process

Some companies, especially hoity-toity I'm-better-than-you financial firms in The City, ask for a résumé before they'll let you temp there for long periods of time. They only want the cream of the crop, you see, and they feel they shouldn't let anyone temp there unless there's a possibility they'll hire the person in the end. If you do go this route, you'd better check out the section later on making your résumé sparkle.

The Best Jobs

How to get the best jobs? The cushy jobs? Your basic goal is to get AA or receptionist jobs. AA is Administrative Assistant jobs (i.e., secretary). The company will usually request, "Someone who knows Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and has good administrative skills." Bullshit. When you get there, you find out they didn't really need anyone at all. Usually all you end up doing is taking the mail once a day and sticking it into mailboxes. Oh, how exhausting!

Administrative assistant jobs are best when you are supporting just one male executive, especially if you are also male. He will be reluctant to throw work at you for fear of looking like a wimp. Of course, if you're a woman assisting a male executive, they will throw all kinds of work at you, since you have become their surrogate Mommy.

Women executives are more anxious to dump work on your desk, because they're trying to employ the tough rules of business. These are general guidelines, of course, and don't always hold strictly true, but I've found these stereotypes popping up again and again and feel they're pretty accurate.

Executive support is usually best when there are multiple executives. Each exec thinks you're busy with work that the others gave you, so you end up doing nothing.

If you take a receptionist job you'll find yourself sitting at the front desk of a company, or sitting at a desk in the corridor by the elevators. Reception jobs are good because no one's there to bother you. They're bad because often the receptionist's desk has hot bright lights shining on it, and it's hard to leave the desk. On the good side, receptionists often have their own computer, and sometimes even their own printer.

The kind of jobs you want to stay away from are "task" jobs. This is where you're hired to perform a particular task. Like setting up a fashion show. Or taking inventory for a store. Or typing forms into a computer. Anytime you're hired to perform a particular task, you will be expected to *do something*. That's bad. You don't want to do anything. Unless, of course, you're doing your own personal projects.

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Still, if they're only one-day jobs, then that's fine, since it doesn't steal away too much of your life from you.

One-day jobs are superb (as long as they're not task jobs). You're not expected to know anything, and everyone at the company assumes you're incompetent, so they don't trust you to do their work. Also, if anything's *really* important they say, "Aw, Francine will be back tomorrow, so I'll just give it to her then." Two-day jobs are usually about the same. Jobs that last a week to ten days are also prone to be located on Easy Street for the same reasons, though the likelihood of work increases the longer you're assigned to a company. Naturally you can't expect not to do any work, and you mustn't assume there's no work to do. It depends on the company and what's going on that day.

Try to shoot for bigger companies. The bigger the better, for the less work you'll be asked to do, and the more laid-back the other employees will be.

I had a ten-day job at Lucent Technologies where I was asked only to make a few photocopies each day. The rest of the time I read, wrote, studied, and made personal photocopies. My first week-long job at AT&T was even better. I did absolutely nothing the whole time. Zilch. *Nada*. The funny thing is, the first day of both jobs I was given extensive "training" by the women whom I was replacing while they went on vacation. Both women confided in me that, "I'd probably do nothing," and, "Other temps have said they didn't do anything the whole time." How right they were!

Assignments longer than ten days or so are a toss-up. It depends on the situation. If they specifically say you will be working a particular length of time with the company, then it probably is a good deal. However, if the length of the job is

unspecified, be wary, for they probably have work for you to do. The reason I say that is because if they don't know exactly how long they'll need you, it's probably because they're hiring for the position, or they have some project for you to work on. Bad news in either case. Take such assignments only if you need the money and don't expect to achieve your dreams on those jobs. (In most of the unspecified-length jobs I've been on, I was still able to take care of some personal business, just not as much as on other jobs.)

Lucinda is a temp I met at Lucent Technologies. She said that for the first several months of her assignment she did absolutely nothing. She spent her time Web-browsing. She complained to her boss about the lack of work (moron!), so they started giving her more to do. She confessed that she still spends much of her temp time surfing the Internet and studying for school (she's going for advanced degrees), and that's the way it's been for the past seven years!

Long-term jobs where they tell you exactly how long you'll be with the company are a good bet. (Though not a sure bet!) I had a wonderful three-month temp job at AT&T where I did every evil thing explained in this book, from wrangling free office supplies, to placing long-distance phone calls, to figuring my taxes, to researching, computer consulting, conducting radio and journalistic interviews, letter-writing, and book writing — all on the job, and all while getting paid!

If you're not sure whether or not to take a long-term assignment, ask your counselor what she's heard about the company. If you'll be replacing a temp who's already there, ask to speak with that temp about it. Find out exactly what you're expected to do, whether the co-workers are jerks, and how much down-time exists on the job. Be wary of the an-

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swers you're given, since the temp might be reluctant to say how easy the job is for fear that she'll look like she's been taking them for a ride all this time. On the other hand, if you're ever talking to a temp and find out she's on some great do-nothing assignment, you might want to mention to your counselor that you'd like to be placed at the same company.

Some of the cushiest temp jobs of all are those that take place under cloak of darkness. Night jobs usually pay more. There isn't any supervisor looking over your shoulder. You might have the run of the place. Sometimes you're even reimbursed for dinner. The downside is that night jobs are often task jobs, so you might actually have work to do.

Keep all these factors in mind when choosing assignments, and you'll be assured of cushy temp jobs where you'll get paid for sitting in a chair and vegetating.

The Wide World of Temping

Industries have unique personalities you should be aware of. Technology companies are the best, because everyone is computer-literate, they enjoy using their computers, and they are emotionally stable. Also the dress code tends to be relaxed. Financial firms are the complete opposite: strict dress codes and very uptight.

Ad agencies are snakepits filled with whiny crybabies who explode into angry fits at the slightest ripple in their bathwater. Ad agencies are also (I don't know why) filled with people from other countries, especially England, and this seems to cause a lot of problems with interpersonal communication, as the different countries all have slightly different ways of expressing themselves. After temping at three differ-

ent ad agencies I know for certain I would never want to work for one permanently.

Mainstream magazines and book publishing companies are breeding grounds for emotionally distressed women in their editorial departments. The sales departments tend to be more stable. I'm telling you this so you'll know, if you're ever offered a job in an editorial office or ad agency, not to expect a glowing recommendation. No matter what you do they'll be on your case, or — more likely — they'll be pleasant to your face and backstab you by offering harsh words to your temp agency. Be warned! Start making excuses now.

Alternative Temping

Not all tempwork comes from temp agencies. Consider these other options for obtaining temporary employment.

- *Internships and externships.* The pay is paltry, or non-existent, but internships can be used as a means of breaking into a particular business if you're more interested in your long-term future than short-term moneymaking.
- *In-house temps.* Large companies oftentimes have their own in-house temping department. Sometimes temps are called "floaters." **Advantage:** You always know exactly where you'll be each day. **Disadvantage:** If you screw up or get caught working on your personal stuff, you lose out on a good deal.
- *Flextime and job sharing.* Flextime is pretty cool if you can arrange it. You work a little longer certain days, but then you get to leave early or not come in at all for the rest of the week. Job sharing is just what it sounds like — you share a desk with someone else, and you come in for only half the week, the other person comes in the other

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half. Both of these options leave many hours or days open for you to enjoy all the rest of your non-work life.

- *Going right to the source.* Some temps have been known to bypass the temp agency and go straight to the human-resources department of companies, offering their services as a temp. Usually this is done after experiencing the company first-hand as a temp, loving it, and wanting to go back for more. If you can negotiate a deal you will be raking in more money, since you don't have to share it with the agency. **Downside:** It's hard to break through the corporate bureaucracy which penalizes individualism, but give it a try if this sounds appealing.
- *Ads.* Occasionally you will see ads for one-day or two-day jobs taking inventory at a store or other temporary assignments. These can't be used for writing the Great American Novel, but you can earn some money, and perhaps qualify for a discount on store merchandise, and maybe even land a permanent position there.

Got the Smarts?

June 30
Condé Nast, women's
magazine, \$13/hour.
The elevators here are
filled with beautiful
fashion models!

As more and more companies consummate deals with the Devil, they come to realize the value of hiring temps to do their shitwork. If you've got certain skills, like computer programming, CAD/CAM, paralegalese, accounting know-how, medical training, Quark, or anything

else, there might be a special temp agency just for you. This practice of firing perms to make way for temps cuts through

all strata of the workforce. A doctor I know was recently canned from his job, because his company decided to fire everyone and rehire them on a temporary basis. You will make more money as a skilled temp if you've got the skills, but you should only take on such temp jobs if you care more about your freedom and flexibility than money and medical coverage. And by the way, any "skill temp" assignment you get will undoubtedly require you to do *actual work*. Shudder!

Negotiating is Your Right

One of the biggest secrets kept from temps is that they have certain rights on the job, and it's in their best interest to speak up when those rights are violated. For example, suppose a job is canceled unexpectedly, through no fault of your own. Some temps have been able to receive partial compensation when a job ended prematurely, or when they showed up for a job and found it was canceled. The agency might gripe that you don't get paid if they don't get paid, but if you advance a well-articulated case, you might be able to squeeze a few bucks out of them.

A few times I've stupidly shown an employer that I was competent, and they responded by giving me work to do. Sometimes they gave me work of a higher caliber than that for which I was hired. In such cases we must recognize that we're being *screwed*, and fight, fight, fight it! If you're hired to do data entry but they give you PowerPoint presentations to prepare, you have to recognize that's a higher-skilled job that deserves more compensation. Call your temp agency immediately and mention it to them. They won't like being screwed out of the money any more than you do, and you can expect them to do something about it.

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Making Cushy Jobs Cushier

Some jobs are incredibly hectic with high workloads, and not so cushy at all. Usually there are ways to reduce the workload so you can still have free time remaining to work on your own projects.

My usual ploy is to come each morning with a full head of steam, plow through the work, and then keep the rest of the day to myself. Many jobs are not as complicated as people make them out to be, and if you just stick with it, don't goof off, and don't take smoke breaks, you can get the work done fast.

Get it right the first time. The biggest time-saving device in the world is doing your job correctly the first time you do it. Double-check your work. Spellcheck. When your boss assigns you some work, listen carefully to the instructions. Ask questions if you don't understand. If you still don't understand, ask more questions. There should be question marks floating in your eyeballs from all your curiosity. Then, repeat the whole assignment back to him. "So you're saying you want me to do this, then this, then that. Right?" Don't do work if you're not sure you're doing it correctly. Find out exactly what you're supposed to be doing, and then proceed to do it!

If the job is repetitive in any way I like to write a small computer program that will do the work for me. Microsoft Word has WordBasic built into it, which has helped me out on many occasions. Instead of having to perform certain calculations over and over, I simply programmed it into WordBasic and a push of a button was all it took.

Read the desk plan. Many secretaries and administrative assistants have a desk plan, instructions to temps, or job

guidelines sheet which explains exactly what the job entails. Read it thoroughly to find out the real dirt about the job. Sometimes these desk plans are a little out of date or wrong, but generally they're very helpful. Here's a common scenario:

The human resources idiot leads you to your desk. "Barnaby gets a lot of calls," she says, "so you'll be answering the phones all day." You notice the telephone has eighteen different labels for all the executives who work in the office. Of course, only their first names are listed on the phone, so you don't know how in the world you're supposed to answer the telephone. "You've reached Becky's office, Becky isn't here," doesn't sound professional. So as soon as the H.R. dragon waddles back to her den, you approach the assistant in the next cubicle. "Is there a list of the executives' last names? I don't know how to answer the phone." The assistant smiles and says, "Aw, you don't have to answer the phone. The usual assistant never does." "I don't have to answer the phones? But the human resources —" Another assistant, at another desk, chimes in: "That H.R. gal doesn't know what she's talking about."

So you sit the rest of the day and don't answer any phones. No matter how often they ring, no matter how guilty you feel, you don't answer them. Why should you? You're busy writing your book about temping!

I've gone on temp jobs where the desk plan said to answer some executives' phones, but not others. Usually the executives will approach you during the day just to introduce themselves, or to drop off some work for their regular secretary to do tomorrow. When they stop by, ask them how they'd like their phone answered. Chances are they'll tell you not to bother.

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Ask the executives directly, if you can, regardless of what the other secretaries advise you. After all, the other secretaries are probably full of shit. They can't get you fired, but your boss can. So ask the executives directly whenever possible. If you find yourself in a situation where you actually do have a lot to do, it could be that you've stumbled into a company where the employees view a temp as a beast of burden, meant to haul around their work on your back. Keep in mind you ain't no donkey. Talk to your supervisor at the company and ask him exactly whose work you should be hauling. Undoubtedly he'll say his own work is the only work that's important, and he will immediately rebuke the others for piling on all their drudgery.

Perhaps the best advice I can give on how to take the work out of temp jobs is to *be as competent as you can*. It will increase your efficiency, spare you the agony of having to redo work, and your superiority may even embarrass your bosses into not giving you busywork to do at all.

Why do they hire us to do nothing?

You may be wondering why a company would be stupid enough to hire temps to sit there and do nothing? Several reasons:

- *Bureaucrazy.* The company is a crazy bureaucracy that has a set of rules which must be obeyed. It may have a rule that if someone's out, a temp must be hired to replace them for the day. The company figures that if they have hired someone permanently for that position, it must be a role so valuable that even one day without its function will drive the corporation into the ground.

- *Just in case.* They hire temps *just in case* they need some work done. Usually they only need minimal work done, and that justifies it in their crossed eyes.
- *Posturing.* Most people's jobs really aren't as hard as they make them out to be. People like to posture, and pretend that they do so much work it's unbelievable how they manage to get through the day without keeling over from a heart attack. This is especially true in today's climate of downsizing, right-sizing, layoffs, and firings. If you don't show that you're crucial to the company, you'll be out the door in no time flat.

These reasons all mean you'll end up getting plenty of cushy assignments in your pseudo-career as a temp. Want to continue receiving those jobs as long as possible? Okay, keep reading.

Holding On

Retaining Your Higher Powers

Now that you've started to get cushy temp jobs, you want to keep them! By putting on a happy face and acing the skills tests with flying colors, you've put yourself into a powerful position, for you've commandeered all the best temp jobs for yourself. Now, as you are sent on these assignments, it's up to you to maintain your power, retain your prestige with your counselors, and keep on getting cushy jobs. Through this chapter and the next I'll tell you all I know about staying on friendly terms with the agency and the various companies you're assigned to, so you'll continue being seen as the shining apple of their eye.

Through all of this you have to keep in mind that I always advocate doing a good job. Even when you cheat on the skills tests, steal office supplies, and work on your own personal activities on company time, all of that comes secondary to your main purpose for being there: doing work for the company, and doing a good job at it. The only way you can get away with personal fulfillment is if you first do all your work, and do a great job of it. *I'm not advocating goofing off on the job.* I'm saying you can get jobs at which you're not required to work — thus you can do personal business without goofing off.

You're Being Watched

Your very first temp job is likely to be a short one, so they can test you out and see what you're made of. Do great at it! If it's a short office job (one day), then take it just to show them you're flexible but within limits — you're doing them a

favor. You're making their job easier. Scratch their backs, they'll scratch yours. They will love you for it.

If you think once you're out on assignment that it's just you and the company, then I'm afraid you're pretty naïve. It's always you, the company, and the temp agency looking over your shoulder. The agency will call the company to see how you're doing. If the company is satisfied with your performance, they will say so. If the company is ready to kill you for your screw-ups, both you and the agency will definitely hear about it. Now here comes the catch: exactly who does the temp agency get the story from? Your boss at the company? No, that would make too much sense. Generally the agency calls the human resources department to find out how you're doing. That means the agency gets the story second-hand, which means it might not be exactly accurate.

This means you can't just present a pretty face to your boss. The human resources people are important too. H.R.s are the ones who will deliver your report card, so be sure to smile at them, act positive and professional, and when asked how you enjoyed the assignment tell them how great it was. They'll see you as a positive asset whom they love to invite back again.

You Never Know...

As you go out on temp assignments, you will encounter many nice people and many jerks. Always be nice to *everyone* you meet, showing them respect, and demonstrating to them that you are better than any of the lowdown tactics they may employ to try and agitate you. Don't gossip. Don't badmouth people behind their back. It doesn't matter if you're talking to your counselor, another temp, a permanent employee, your

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boss, the human relations department, or the janitor — *always maintain a kind and friendly demeanor. You never know when your words will be overheard. You never know when your foul words will come back to haunt you.*

Consider the case of Ann, a temp who was working at a financial firm. She jokingly referred to her boss as a “retarded mongoloid.” She thought she was okay to say that since she was only kidding around to a fellow temp. Later that day, the other temp happened to repeat the comment on the phone when talking to her counselor. “How do you like the job?” “It’s okay, except my stupid boss. No, wait, what was that word Ann used before? Oh yeah, retarded mongoloid!” Naturally the mongoloid boss was sitting in the next cubicle hearing every word of it. Both temps got fired the same day.

Remember that everyone deserves your respect, no matter what their position with the firm. Once I was approached by the janitor. “Hey,” he said, “I hear you’re looking for a job!” *Oh God*, I thought. *What does he want?* It turned out that janitor was an accountant by day for Prudential, and had taken this janitorial job at night to pick up some spare cash. He had some leads on a few computer jobs he thought I might be interested in! So don’t look down on anyone because of their rank or position. After all, bucko, you’re “just a temp” yourself.

On the other hand, as you go around being nice and helpful to everyone of every rank, be sure you’re spreading your love to the proper persons. Just because someone is handing you work, for instance, doesn’t mean they’re the ones you’re supposed to please. It’s no good being extra-special to someone all day when you find out later that it was another temp

passing the buck your way — and you've been ignoring the real boss's workload.

Work Smart

Whenever I've landed a cushy job for myself, I always make sure there really isn't any work to do before launching into my own projects. Every hour or so, get up, ask around if you can help anyone with anything. It will make you look like a prince, and you probably won't get any work out of it anyway, so you can go back to writing the screenplay that will make you famous.

Do your job properly. Be prompt in the morning, do what they ask of you immediately, before you attack your own work. Occasionally I've been asked favors, usually at task jobs, and I try to oblige. At the Calvin Klein fashion show we were behind schedule, so they asked all us temps to stay later. While most of the other temps walked out of there grumbling, I agreed to stay an extra half hour, and I put in my most diligent work of the day. It was only a measly 30 minutes, but boy did I get thanks and praise heaped upon me by my boss, and later by my counselor at the agency. How do you think they felt about the other temps who walked out on them at their time of need? The next day, while sitting in the temp agency, I saw them turn away one of the other temps who had walked out on the job at 5 pm the night before. He didn't scratch their backs, you see, so why should they scratch his now? Do those little things to show you care, so others will care for you.

If the client asks you to stay later, and you do so, then make sure you mention it to your agent the next time you see her. Be happy about it, not miserable; *don't complain!!!* Al-

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ways let them know what a fun time you had, how you improved your skills, and how much you're enjoying your temping experience. Are you getting the message? Those temps who gripe, complain, and spout conspiracy theories don't get good jobs and they fall between the cracks because they just aren't nice people. They're cranky. They're sarcastic. When you change your attitude, you change the kinds of assignments you will receive.

You're a Temp, Not an Interior Decorator

You probably have your own unique preferences in life. Make sure you respect the preferences of others. If you don't like the way someone has their desk arranged, or the colors on their computer screen give you a headache, then you can change them to your liking — but remember to change them back at the end of the day. I try not to change anything. I use it as a way of broadening my horizons to new ways of doing things, to open my mind so it's not so inflexible, so it doesn't stay rigidly locked into my own arbitrary likings. Sometimes I simply can't bear to work in the environment the regular secretary has arranged for herself. (Like the secretary who strapped a lumbar support to her chair, but attached it incorrectly upside down, so not only did it not provide the desired effect, but it was decidedly uncomfortable. I had to remove it for the week — and then remember to replace it the wrong way before leaving the assignment.)

At the last few places I've temped there have been warnings in the desk plan not to mess with the secretary's colors on her computer. Apparently temps sit there with nothing to do, so they figure they'll go ahead and mess with the computer settings, stupidly forgetting that such actions will annoy

the secretary when she comes back to work the next day. I guarantee the secretary will complain to her boss, who will complain to the human resources person. Are you willing to risk a bad report because you don't like the colors someone has selected?

Make a list of everything you change. At the end of your assignment, go through the checklist and put things back the way you found them. While you're at it, brush off your crumbs, polish the desk, straighten it out a little. Leave everything glowing, so the secretary doesn't come back growling.

Be the most Goddamned Helpful Person on the Planet

Before you go home for the night, ask around to find out if anyone needs help with anything before you go. Usually they'll say no. Then just wish them good night and be on your way. If it's a long-term temp job, you don't have to do this every night, but be sure to do it the first night, and every once in a while after that.

If you expect to be absent from the job the following day, be sure everyone there knows about it. If you've been working on an assignment, leave notes that explain exactly where all computer files are located, and any other information they will need in your absence. Not only should you leave notes, but *tell them and show them* what's going on. Always remember that the people around you are dimwits who can't be expected to comprehend written instructions. I had that experience when I temped in the advertising department of a bridal magazine. I left explanatory notes which described exactly what I was doing, where my files were stored, etc. I figured that would be enough to get them by the next day. Boy was I wrong! They were furious at me because they didn't

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know where the files were located. I was flabbergasted. They had seen the notes, but for some reason that wasn't good enough for them. Apparently their brains were too clouded to read. Their stupidity led to me being terminated from the job. Not the highlight of my temping career. **Lesson:** Never underestimate the stupidity or the vengefulness of the people you work for.

When Trouble Strikes Your Relationship with the Agency

Be the first with bad news. If you think you're going to receive a bad report from a job, inform your counselor about it. Do so in a positive, laughing manner, but please be sure to do so. Tell your counselor the true story of what went on. Explain that you did your best work, but they just didn't appreciate anything you did for them. Say this with a smile on your face. Happy! Always happy! If you've been doing good work all along, your counselor will understand that there are jerks in the world, and the bad report is not a reflection on you, but a reflection on others' jerkiness. Besides, usually when I've mentioned jerky bosses, my counselor rolls her eyes and tells me that other temps have said the same thing about those people.

Keep 'Em in the Palm of Your Hand

Be kind to your agency. As vital as it is to maintain good relationships with the companies you temp at, it's even more important to remain in good standing with your temp agency. They are your true employer. They give you your paycheck. And they control the assignments to which you will be assigned. Be kind to them. Offer friendly hellos, seasons' greetings, and always a positive attitude. Most of all, do a

great job at every assignment they send you out on. The best gift you can give them is to prove that they can feel at ease any time they send you out on a job, because you will perform superbly for them.

When you're doing their stupid busy work, gritting your teeth and smiling at their insanity, working the extra 30 minutes here and there to maintain good status with the company, always remember that this is your choice, not theirs. It is you making these decisions, and you're doing so for a higher purpose — to stay on good terms with the temp agency and the company, and therefore to continue receiving cushy jobs which you can exploit to your advantage.

Case in Point

Let me tell you a story that sums up all of this, and shows how by acting with efficiency and courtesy, and getting your brains involved, you can slack off, do personal work, still make a favorable impression on the boss, and win yourself a loyal following in the temp agency.

July 1
Lucent Tech,
\$11/hour.

It was at the Federal Deposit and Insurance Corporation (the F.D.I.C.). Some banks insured by F.D.I.C. were closing or being combined, and they expected a flood of callers, who'd be worried that their money would be lost. Thirty temps were hired to answer telephones and schedule appointments along with twenty regular F.D.I.C. employees.

I was assigned a far-away cubicle all the way in the farthest reaches of the immense office. I was very young. It was one of my first temp jobs so I didn't know about bringing my own personal work to do. At first I sat there and didn't do any-

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thing because there was no work to do. Then I volunteered to help out one of the F.D.I.C. employees. He thought that was nice of me to help him — and it was! — but it also helped *me* because it showed I was a cut above the rest. Also, by helping him with his work, I learned some valuable lessons about how the company worked, some of their procedures, and where the copy room was located. All of this would be valuable later on, because when the manager needed a temp to get something done, I was the only one who knew how to do it.

While helping him, I noticed a problem with some of the papers. We had been handed hundreds of pages listing the people who had savings accounts in the banks. I noticed that most of the pages hadn't photocopied correctly, and so the last few digits of the account numbers had been sheared off. I guess this whole thing was a big rush job, and F.D.I.C. employees were frantically trying to set up the hotline, train the temps, copy the paperwork, and in their flutterings they had done a bad job of it. Looking ahead I realized that if we started using these incorrect account numbers, it would screw up the company for months to come! Every call that was placed on the hotline would be incorrectly attributed to a phony bank customer. Every appointment that was scheduled would be wrong, because every appointment would be referred to by a non-existent account number. I mentioned this problem to the F.D.I.C. guy I was helping. He took an attitude that I've since seen repeated many times by long-suffering workers in all the jobs I've ever worked at: apathy. He sighed, "Oh, I'm sure they know about that problem. I wouldn't worry about it if I were you."

So I didn't worry about it.

I spent the rest of the night chatting with other temps, making out with one particularly cute girl in my cubicle, and goofing off.

The next morning I came in a little earlier than I was supposed to (they had neglected to tell me my hours had been changed). The floor manager was a gorgeous Texan who probably spent her youth in teen beauty pageants. She was delighted when I asked if there was anything I could do to help until the telephone hotline opened for the morning. She handed me some spreadsheets that had been generated the night before when the temps and F.D.I.C. employees had talked to bank customers on the phone and entered their information into the computer. She showed me how much of the information had been entered incorrectly. She asked me to look for mistakes and fix them.

As I began to work on this, I realized that many of the account numbers were wrong also, just as I'd predicted. I figured out a way of finding the missing digits by cross-referencing the names on another list of data. After awhile I remembered what the guy had advised me last night: "Don't worry about it." I knew he must be wrong, but I wasn't sure. So I went over to the floor manager and asked her opinion. "Do you also want me to add the missing digits to the account numbers?" I asked. Her eyes widened. "You *know* how to do that?" she asked. She explained that they had noticed that problem but didn't know what to do about it. She was ecstatic that I found a solution!

I went back to my desk feeling charged full of excitement, and continued correcting the pages. Pretty soon other temps and F.D.I.C. employees started wandering in for the day. The floor manager selected eight of them, and put *me* in charge of

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them. I was to train them in how to correct the errors on the paperwork. I was to answer their questions. I was to be in charge. Remember, this was my second day on the job, and the first day I had done no assigned work at all! Plus I was a temp! And here I was, a new temp, being put in charge of a team of other temps and regular F.D.I.C. employees! Later I asked Miss Texas if I could work the hotlines, but she said, "Not right now. You're too valuable to me doing this." That felt good. I got a good recommendation from her. The final three days of that job were pleasant diversions filled with high praise from the boss and absolutely no more work to perform.

How come I, *a temp*, was put in charge of permanent employees? How come out of all those thirty temps and twenty regulars, only I was able to see the problem and find a solution for it? It was by going in and doing the work. Thinking about things. Using my brain. Being willing to speak up and show my stuff. That's why I feel no sympathy when I hear people complaining they don't get sent on jobs because their counselor doesn't like them, or because they're black, or for whatever excuse they complain about, because I know you have to *make them like you*. You have to prove to them that you're better than the thirty other temps they could send out on the job in your place. I try to bring that attitude to every temp job I work at, even as I'm doing my best to screw the company into the ground.

Working Too Hard

I don't like to work. I don't like to work hard. I do like to work smart, when I'm forced to work at all. Usually I work slow, but my bosses don't believe me when I say that to

them, because they see that I accomplish jobs quicker than most. That's because my slow and steady pace always wins the race! By working carefully I do things right the first time, so I don't have to go back and do them again. By thinking about smarter ways of accomplishing tasks, I get things accomplished in half the time. My very first temp job ever was at a company called Educaid, where I was hired for a four-day job of data entry. I saw that there were shortcuts I could take, using the computer's Copy & Paste options and macro capabilities, to speed up the workload. At the end of the first four hours I was done with *everything*. I had accomplished a four-day job in four hours. They were impressed and overjoyed — and I had screwed myself out of three days of work. **Lesson:** How well you do your work may affect how much money you'll get and how much work they'll give you.

The First Day

Your first day on the job is a special time because that is when you make your first impression. Hell, the first *second* on the job is when you make your first impression. You might even say it starts the day before. When I'm not exactly sure how to drive to a job, I hop in my car and find the place the day before. I'm always assured of getting there on time when it really counts — the crucial first day — because I've already taught myself how to get there.

If the boss asks, "You have trouble finding the place?" just smile and respond, "Not at all!" Even if you've just spent two hours in bumper-to-bumper gridlocked traffic heading the wrong direction and crawling through five traffic circles until you finally found the building. This is no time to complain.

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You want them to see how peppy you are, and for that matter, what a great manipulator of the roadways you can be.

When I'm temping in a large office building, the first thing I do is write the floor number and room number on my ID badge, and put it in my pocket. When I come back from lunch (or when I come in the next day) I know exactly where I'm going. Some of those office buildings are maze-like!

The first day, dress in your finest professional clothes. Some companies, like technology firms and ad agencies, may have casual attire every day of the week. *It doesn't matter. You should still dress up the first day.* After that, dress to the level of the other employees. Early in my temping career I made the mistake of staying in a shirt and tie (or even a suit and tie) when everyone else dressed down. I thought it made me look more professional. Wrong! It made me look like an awkward stiff. It makes other people uncomfortable when you dress above them or beneath them. So dress your best the first day, but after that, bring yourself to their level.

Long-Term Blues

Long-term temping jobs can feel deadening, especially once you've gotten used to shorty one-day assignments, or not showing up for work at all when you don't feel like it. But if you find yourself being presented with a long-term job that you just might take, do what I do: tell the counselor, "Yes, I'd love to take it! Just one thing, I have another obligation the last Monday of the month. Will that be a problem?" Of course I don't really have any obligation that Monday, I'm just telling her that because I want to plan a three-day weekend for myself. Usually your counselor will ask if you can get out of your obligation? Then I say, "I don't think so, but if I

if I get the job, I can try.” If they really want you for the job (and they *do* want you because you’ve shown them what a great worker you are and your skills are excellent) then they usually compromise with you. Usually they give you the job and allow you to take that Monday off. If not, decide whether you do want to take the job, and if so, tell them you’ll cancel the other appointment. The trick doesn’t always work, and can cost you the job if the agency doesn’t really like you, but it’s worth a shot if you feel too claustrophobic by the prospect of settling into a long-term assignment.

When the Job is Beneath You

Do you find yourself grumbling when handed jobs that are beneath you? This seems to be a big problem with some people who have a chip on their shoulder. They complain that certain jobs are beneath their dignity. When I’m stuck photocopying dozens of copies of a stupid marketing presentation, I just think, *Ha ha! They’re paying me to press a button! What losers!*

If the Boss is an Asshole

Stay at temping long enough and you’ll encounter some real assholes. If you’re assigned a week-long job or longer posting where the boss is a bitch, an asshole, a whole ass, or anything other than a fine human being, you have to make a conscious decision whether to stay on or not.

Remember that you are a temp, and one of your perks is that you can leave if the going gets rough.

In such situations it’s very likely you’ll be dumped anyway, probably not because of anything you do, but just because the boss is a bitch. By warning the agency beforehand you’re

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making it clear that you are doing everything you can to bring harmony to the situation, but there may come a point when you no longer can take the abuse.

Tell your counselor — nicely! — as soon as possible that you're working for a jerk. Tell her you're going to stay on for now and make the best of it, but you might be forced to leave if he keeps up his behavior. Make sure your counselor understands that you're doing this as a personal favor to her. Again I remind you to tell her this in a laughing way. Don't gripe. Don't complain. Don't blame her for the lousy assignment. Just let her know what's going on, but don't make it seem as if you're angry about it.

If Your Counselor is an Asshole

On the other hand, what should you do if you're in bad situation at your temp agency? If you're currently signed up at agency and they don't like you, they send you on lousy jobs, or you've acted rude to them in the past, it's in your best interest to leave the situation and move on to a different temp agency. Before you go, why not take advantage of the situation by educating yourself on the job, using the agency's skill classes to improve yourself, and show them you're making an effort to change? After you've mastered the skills of keyboard and communication, *then* move on to the next agency, and you'll start there with a clean slate, a fresh start, and great assignments which will come your way.

Dealing with Crankiness

There's a tendency to get lazy and cranky and act like a horrible person when you're temping. As an outsider you see what the regular employees can not see: that they are idiots.

That their procedures are stupid. That they run their company like fools. Anytime you start feeling cranky or upset, you should *smile*. It's a temp job after all! You'll be gone in a little while, but they're stuck there! And not only is it just a stupid temp job, but it's one that you're exploiting with grace and charm, in order to fulfill your life's dreams or at least to steal a few office supplies. So when you start to feel down, smile a little and remember the day will be over soon, this job will be over as well, and it all will pass.

Crankiness and laziness can sometimes be attributed to the food you eat. At one long-term assignment I found that on certain days I would become groggy and headachy in the afternoon. I was so sleepy that I didn't even feel up to working on the books I was writing! I decided it must be the foods I ate on those days. I started a food study, carefully recording which foods I ate and how I felt after eating them. My first guess was that carbohydrates were getting me down. But the study showed that wasn't it. A co-worker suggested meat was the culprit. My next guess was turkey, but soon that was ruled out too. Finally, after conducting the study for two weeks, I had it figured out: a particular kind of roll the cafeteria served. Whenever I ate that roll, I was lethargic the rest of the day. I don't know what they put into the dough, but believe me I stopped eating that item immediately, and never experienced the symptoms again. I was fit as a fiddle and able to continue fulfilling my dreams on the job.

Responding to Idiots

People are morons wherever you go. You know that, so you've got to be prepared for it. No matter where you temp,

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you will hear the same idiotic comments and “jokes” over and over again. Here’s how to respond:

When they say...

“You don’t look like Sandra!”

you reply...

Smile! “Ha ha ha ha ha! I’m pleased to hear that!” Resist the urge to shoot back a joke about your recent sex change operation. You will hear this same dumb joke every place you temp. Get used to it.

“Are you busy or bored?”

“Doing great! How are you?” I never understand this question. The person assumes that if you’re not given menial work to perform, then you will be bored. All this shows is that the person asking the question is a boring person, for they can not envision that you’ve prepared your own personal projects and reading material to occupy your time and mind through the course of the day.

“You’re the temp?”

“Yes, I’m John. How are you today?” Show them that just even though you’re a temp, you’re not a leper, you’re actually a human being, and you’re actually quite a normal person just as they are.

Training Your Replacements

After temping for a few months at AT&T, I decided I’d had enough of it, and it was time to leave. I knew I’d done a superb job. My bosses there were lovely, friendly, happy women who adored me as I adored them. The work was minimal: I finished my stupid AT&T paperwork in a few hours each morning, and then had the rest of the day to myself. During that job I wrote several magazine articles, prepared countless résumés, helped a friend with a book he was working on, wrote and researched one of my own books, read umpteen periodicals and tomes, got in some freelance

computer consulting work, used their telephones to conduct radio interviews, and pursued intellectual inquiry into some topics that interested me. I was pleased with myself for having gotten paid to accomplish all these personal goals. Oh yeah, and I stole a hell of a lot of office supplies too. But it was time to leave, for I knew by good sources that the company wasn't hiring, and in fact would be laying off hundreds of workers in a few weeks. I figured I had gotten all I could out of the job. But there was one more task I was required to do. I would have to train my replacement.

What if my replacement is really smart? I worried. Worse, *what if she's competent?* I was enjoying the luxury of doing hardly any work and getting fantastic references from my bosses there, and I wanted to maintain a lasting impression in their minds. I decided I would purposely do a bad job of training my replacement. You see, over the course of

three months I had learned many time-saving techniques to speed up the job, make it more efficient, and decrease errors. For instance, I had written two little computer programs that did a lot of the work for me. I had written up a list of important information I'd collected about the job, to help me find information when I needed it. I had created a filing system that helped me breeze through my paperwork each day.

All these things had to go!

I deleted the information files from the computer, destroyed my filing system, and erased my computer programs.

July 2
Ogilvy & Mather,
15\$/hour. Was
requested back today
by H.R. person.
I don't know why,
since I didn't do
anything the first time
here!

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I restored my office and computer to the way it was when I first showed up at the job, when there was nothing there. *Why should the next temp get the fruits of my labor?* I asked myself. *I had to think smart to come up with all those labor-saving devices. I had to work hard and go through a lot of trial and effort. Why should the next temp have it easy? Let them do the work I did.* It may not have been nice, it may not have been fair, but when was the last time life was nice or fair to you? Why should I give my armor to protect another temp in her lion's den? Nobody gave me their armor when I started. We've all got to look after ourselves. When it came time to train my replacement, I did an adequate job, but didn't do as good a job as I was capable of. My replacement seemed a little ditzy anyway. She was more interested in chatting than learning about the job, so whenever I thought of one more thing she needed to know, I would just let it slip my mind. Hopefully the bosses there will reminisce fondly about me, especially every time my replacement screws up the job. They'll shake their heads and mutter, "Boy oh boy, I wish Dennis were still working here!"

Covering Your Ass

What? Are you crazy!? You think you can slip in and out of companies every day, slack off, use their equipment, steal their stuff, and never get fired? Guess again, cutie pie. You may be cute, but your ass is grass if they catch you doing some of these illegal things on company time. They may not mind you reading, but do they enjoy your making 1,000 photocopies of your zine? How about the résumés you send out with their fax machine? The supplies you steal? A recent survey by American Management Association revealed that two-thirds of companies spy on their employees. How, you ask? In many scary ways: They tape phone conversations, keep records of our phone calls, read our e-mail and computer files, videotape us on hidden cameras, and listen in to our voice mail messages.

Shaking yet? Alright then, let's talk about how you can keep your *gluteus* from getting the *bootius* — out the door that is.

What's the Policy?

First of all, if you're temping someplace for any length of time, find out the company policy on using office equipment for non-work-related projects. Indulge yourself in the fascinating verbiage of the policy manual and discover whether there's any mention therein on use of company computers, web browsers, and office copiers for personal projects.

If you're stupid you could ask your boss or one of the robots in Human Resources what company policy is — but then you'd have to have an unsettling discussion with them about

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it — surely you don't want that? Even if you claim you *only* work on personal projects after business hours (yeah right), they will still peg you as a disloyal traitor who hijacked their machinery for your own private obsession. Companies are funny that way: they want to take over your entire life without letting you live any of it yourself.

The point is, don't assume you're "allowed" to use the equipment for your own purposes. Even if they know about your projects and don't openly express negative vibes, they might be silently building a case for dismissal. Try to find out, discreetly, what the rules are in your organization, so you'll know how you stand.

Eyeballs in the Walls

If you don't think your company is spying on you — then you're in a perfect position to be caught off-guard on camera. I was working at a prominent book publisher for several months before a chance conversation with a security guard revealed that most of the offices concealed hidden security cameras in their walls. Not only that, but they had fired maintenance workers after catching them on-camera making phone calls. Here's a story that hits closer to home: I'd been writing this chapter at my temp job at an ad agency, when I looked up and noticed a camera mounted in the ceiling *right in front of my desk*. Sheesh! **Here's what to do:** Be friendly with everyone at your company, especially the security guards, receptionists, and the techies, and when you've established a friendship with them, find out if there are eyeballs in the walls. At another temp job I noticed a techie playing a computer game, so I joked, "Better watch it, they're watch-

ing you on camera.” He said, “Naw, the only camera in this place is the one I installed by the front door.” Bingo!

Clear Out Your Junk

Now let’s talk about all those cream-colored electronic devices that hopefully you will never have to purchase as long as you live, because you’ll always have employers who buy them for you. (Okay, make that temp-employers.) **The first rule is:** Don’t leave behind personal work in the copier, the scanner, the fax machine, or the printer. How embarrassing will it be if you come in to work the next day only to find out that the night before, one of the secretaries pulled her report out of the printer, stapled it together and handed it in — with your editorial on masturbation attached as the last page? Very embarrassing. Remember to clear your originals out of the machines after you use them. Here’s some more pointers on tip-toeing through the garden of corporate devices laid out before ye:

July 7
Ogilvy & Mather,
15\$/hour. (Day 2.)

Copy Machines

The copy machine is one of the most useful perks of temping, so it’s important you learn to use it safely. Don’t get so hypnotized by the flashing lights and the repeating rhythm of the scanning arm that you fail to hear your boss sneaking up behind you. “What’s that?” she’ll ask, as she notices you copying your zine’s centerfold spread, a how-to article on stealing office supplies. **Do This:** Only make a few copies at a time. When I’m photocopying a book, magazine, or anything that is obviously not work-related, I put a pile of

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spreadsheets on top of it. If anyone walks in, all they'll see is a stack of spreadsheets on the glass plate and they'll think I'm copying something work-related. In a really suspicious environment, use the "early in the morning" technique to make copies before everyone else comes in. Late riser? Then try the "before you go home" technique. Wait until most people are starting to leave for the day. Put on your coat, strap on your backpack, then make your copies. It looks as though you're doing some last-minute work before heading out the door.

Fax Machines

Would your boss like the fact that you're receiving article submissions at work on his fax machine? Probably not. How about you tell the faxer to phone before faxing, so you can wait at the machine and pull out the incriminating pages before anyone else does? Also remember that when you send a fax out, your company's name and fax number will be stamped at the top. This might be used to trace the transmission back to YOU, or at the very least it will make the fax number known to people who might then fax something to you when you're not expecting it. **Solution:** The fax manual is laying around someplace. It explains how to reprogram the fax so it doesn't stamp your vital stats onto its every output.

Phones

For some reason bosses don't like it when you make six hundred calls a day to Thailand sex lines. You call it research, they call it reason for dismissal. **My advice:** call from other people's phones. Check the policy-manual guidelines before using your own line for long-distance calls, or if there ain't no policy, try to make only one long-distance call a day (week?)

from your phone, and none too long. If they tape-record phone conversations you'll still be in deep water, so it's imperative you first find out if anything sneaky like that is going on.

Computers

Now we get to the real trouble spot. There are a ton of ways you can get tripped up using the office computers. If they suspect you're spending more time on fun 'n' games than you are on your busywork, they may start monitoring your computer to see what you're doing all day. They can buy spy software that shows them exactly which web sites you travel to. They can also copy your private files, infiltrate your e-mail, and view your computer screen from the comfort of their own office. Buddy up to the guys who run the computer help desk to find out whether any such monitoring is taking place. Regardless of the answer, here are some more traps to watch for:

- *Recently used file lists.* Let's say you use Microsoft Word. And let's say you click on the **File** menu. Does it show a list of recently used files at the bottom? Does the list look like this:
 1. ZINE.DOC
 2. COWSUK.DOC
 3. MY_TRIP.DOC
 4. FREETACO.DOC
 5. Y-I-HATEMYJOB.DOC

Well, if it *does* look anything like that, you need to get rid of that evidence! In Word, select **Tools | Options | General** then make sure **Recently Used File List** has no check mark

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next to it. If you use WordPerfect — aw heck, WordPerfect sucks, figure it out for yourself.

- *Cache folder in web browser.* Every time you visit a web page, a copy of the web page is saved on your hard drive. Usually it's stored in a directory called Cache or Temp. If you ever visit an embarrassing or incriminating web page, and you suspect you're being watched, then you have to delete that file from the directory. The problem is, you probably have no idea what the filename is. Let's say you're ashamed about visiting **www.corn-nibblets.com** "Home of the wibbily nibblets." Use your computer's Find option to search the Cache or Temp directory for the words "wibbily nibblets." Whatever file it comes up with is the offending web page that you should then delete. **Remember:** web browsers also store photos, music files, video clips, and other web-stuff on your hard drive. Delete it at the slightest hint you're being watched, lest they suspect you of playing around on the job.
- *E-mail.* Make sure you destroy old e-mail that could be incriminating. Sometimes even after deleting e-mail (or other files) they're still hanging around someplace on your hard drive, so you've got to be extra careful to avoid disclosure. Microsoft's Internet Explorer is a case in point. It stores deleted e-mail on your computer in a file called **deleted items.mbox** in the **Internet Mail and News directory**—so anyone with access to your computer can peek at your personal correspondence. **Solution:** Go to Explorer's **Mail** icon, click **Read Mail**, then select **Mail | Options** and click on the **Read** tab. Finally check on the **Empty messages from the 'Deleted Items'**

folder upon exit and your e-mails will really be gone for good when you delete them. So there.

- *Time stamp on files.* If you work on your zine during business hours, the files clearly show this, for every file is “time stamped” with the last date and time the file was used. If the file was altered at 10 o’clock in the morning, then obviously you’re working on personal projects during work hours. One easy way to remedy this to temporarily change your computer’s clock time so the computer thinks it’s 6 pm.

Passing Inspection

If you really want to ensure workplace tranquillity while continuing personal projects, then your computer files need to be well-protected. Does your boss sneak into your cubicle and rifle through your hard drive? It happened to me. What if he decides to delete some of the stuff that’s not supposed to be there? What if you get fired and he tells you not to come back into the office, leaving your half-written book on the office hard drive? What if, you ask?

- *Backup computer files on disk.* Well, what if you back up your precious data every night on disks or tapes which you slide into your pocket and take home with you? That way, even if your stuff is discovered when you’re not there, the world won’t have to wait for the next issue of *Coffee House Quarterly*.
- *Boring filenames.* And what if you use boring filenames that won’t arouse suspicion in the first place? Instead of saving your personal memoir as *Leather-Freek.DOC*, save it as *CONFIG.IDX*, and store it in the DOS folder or

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some other inconspicuous place that nobody pokes their nose in.

- *Passwords.* Password protect your documents. Microsoft Word lets you enter a password on the SaveAs dialog box. The first time you save your file, select **File | SaveAs** then press the **Options** button. Type a password in the **Protection Password** field. WordPerfect, Ami Pro, and Acrobat also have password options which can be accessed from the **SaveAs** dialog box. Just type the file-name and check on the **Password protect** check box or press the **Security** button depending on which software you're using. It then lets you type in a protective password. It isn't the greatest security, but should suffice unless you're temping at the CIA. See your horrendous instruction manual for further info.
- *PKZIP.* If you're using Quark or Pagemaker or something else that doesn't come with built-in security, you should get an external encryption program. My favorite is PKZIP. Even when I'm using Word, I still like to zip together all the separate DOC files, BMP files, etc., etc., into one compressed, secure ZIP-file using this software. Use it to compress and password-protect all those files that aren't supposed to be on your office computer. Check out <http://www.target4.com/pkzipfaq.htm> for more info, and instructions on how to download this great shareware program.
- *PGP.* If you want Pretty Good Privacy, you need PGP. That's software that will encrypt your e-mail so no one can read it except you and your cronies who are in on the game. PGP is freeware available at many spots on the web, but I like this spot:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~cybermule/wherepgp.htm>

Load Up Your Stuff Every Night

No matter how safe you appear to be in a temp job, take all your personal stuff home with you every night. You never know when you'll be fired. Move files off the computer and onto your own disks. Take home the books and magazines you're reading, personal projects, and any office supplies you've been hoarding for yourself. The one time I was fired from a temp job it came as a complete surprise to me. I had been overly helpful, friendly to everyone in the place, and they had only thanked me and thanked me again and again. I couldn't believe it when I was informed I had been terminated because my skills were below par. *What?!* Obviously my termination had less to do with my skills, and more to do with the passive aggression of a particular bitch there, but I was fine with it because I had been faithfully following my rule of taking home everything with me each night.

Your Loving Co-Workers

Your co-workers are scumbags who will screw you in a second. And I don't mean the good type of screwing either. You can't trust them, even if they seem nice, and even if you're friends with them. They have the power to rat on you if the boss ever comes around collecting dirt. Don't tell others about your at-work dalliances. Don't let them overhear you blabbing about it on the phone. They won't be impressed and they'll probably just resent your slacking off on the job.

Yippie!

Congrats! You've managed to stay many weeks or months in cushy temp jobs without being fired. Keep up the good

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work. Remember to stay vigilant in your use of passwords, encryption, protection, secrecy, and backups. And remember to keep doing a great job on whatever minimal work is assigned to you. The pay might not be so great, your bosses might be lousy, but at least it's a place which, if you follow these safety rules, you and your personal projects can call home for a long time to come.

Going Temp to Perm

One of the reasons I temp is to collect job offers. Whenever I get fired or laid off from a job, I turn to temping because I know I can get a permanent job out of it. My first experience of this was when I signed up to take inventory at an EMS store. EMS sells camping, hiking, and outdoor gear. After doing the job (along with seven other temps), I received a call the following week from the assistant manager, asking if I'd like a full-time position there. "No, but thank you," I said, "and why are you offering this to me?" His answer was surprising: "The manager said out of all those people there, you were the best worker."

I've had similar job offers at Prudential, Random House, and other companies — sometimes after temping at the company only *one day!*

Now I'll let you in on a little secret. Wanna know how I do it?

The trick is: *Do the job.*

Understand? All you have to do to get job offers, is to *do the job.*

You don't have to rise above and beyond the call of duty. You don't have to be a knight in shining armor, a cowboy, or any other business metaphor. All you have to do, is do the job.

Does it sound too easy? Ah, but wait a second, listen to what I'm telling you. When I say you have to do the job, I mean, you have to *really do the job.*

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July 8

Young & Rubicam,
15\$/hour. (Day 2.)

Noticed one of the
receptionists reading
stupid magazines
today. Asked him
what else he does to
pass the time.

"Nothin'," said the
dummy. He could be
accomplishing
something if he put
his mind to it. Just a
little bit each day
adds up over time.

When I took inventory at EMS, doing the job meant coming in at a certain time on a certain day. (I did—others were late or didn't show up at all.) Doing the job meant learning the rules of inventory and their counting system. (I learned, and asked questions when I didn't understand. Others didn't because they didn't want to look stupid, so they ended up doing it wrong.) Doing the job also meant lots of precise counting, sometimes counting out hundreds of items. Doing the job meant doing all this as perfectly and mindfully as possible. I counted what they asked me to count—but I *really counted it*. I counted precisely. I counted

accurately. I *did the job*. The other people did not do the job. They did not count properly. They made mistakes. They found mistakes but didn't bother to report them. I found plenty of mistakes that others had made, and brought them to the attention of the manager. For all these reasons I was the only one, out of all those temps, who was offered a job. Not because I was a sexy young thing who flashed her titties at the manager; not because I slipped them some bucks; not because I was of the right socioeconomic station or ethnic group; but because I *did the job*. If you do the job, they will be pleased. If you do the job, you may end up getting a permanent position offered to you.

At a crummy Prudential job I was given a stack of papers and asked to type them into the computer. So I did it. When I was done, I approached the manager, a bony, dyed redhead who wore too much perfume, and asked if I could go to lunch. She said yes, and asked how I was coming with the papers. I told her I was finished. She was shocked! I took my full hour for lunch (remember, I'm just doing the job. I don't have to take less than an hour to impress them. I don't have to work overtime, or do special projects, or anything. All I have to do is do the job). At the end of the day she took me in her office and offered a permanent position. Naturally I declined, since the job was lousy and she was annoying. But the principle is valid. Managers are so shocked when you actually do the job that they are willing to hire you for real.

Not every company is hiring. Why should they? If they can hire a temp on the cheap, no reason for them to pay benefits and a salary to a full-timer. The only way you'll find out is by asking your boss or the human relations department whether the company is hiring. The best way to go is to get a long-term assignment at your company of choice. If they are hiring, you're in luck! You have an inside-edge over the competition, since you've already been working in the company. You know the people, the policies, and the procedures. You'll even know about the unadvertised jobs, and will be aware of the advertised jobs well before they make the papers.

You'll also know the inside dope on what the company's *really* like. You'll know who's an asshole, who's nice. You'll know what shape the company's in. Since they're hiring temps it might mean the company is headed for financial ruin — be warned!

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Temping is useful during job hunting, even if you don't wish to work at the company you're temping with. The fact that you're temping means you have something concrete to put on your résumé to account for the lost time between jobs. Temping is also a great way to experience different kinds of jobs at different kinds of companies. It's a way to build your skills, and meet people who can later provide you with glowing recommendations.

Other Job Winning Hints

If you really want to swing your temp fling into a permanent thing, keep these tricks in mind:

- *Choose a Crossroads of America Cubicle.* I coined this expression at a temporary job where I was given a choice of cubicles. I chose a cube that was in the center of it all, right near where lots of executives walked by. That way I got to know all of them, and I could strut my stuff as they strode by each day. Other temps who chose cubicles farther away from the action didn't get to meet any of the critical decision makers of the company. Out of sight, out of luck, out of mind.
- *Show Them What You've Got.* Your bosses might think you're just a stupid, incompetent temp. Maybe that's why they don't give you much work to do. But if you want a full-time job, you've got to show them what you're made of. Tell them, or even better *show them*, exactly what you can do — whether it's computer skills, typing, organizing, creativity, or good phone manner. **Even better still:** Find out what skills they're looking for in an employee, and do whatever is needed to achieve those skills yourself.

- *Tell Them of Your Successes.* Be sure the bosses know every time you achieve any kind of success. It's not enough to tell other temps or co-workers, for at the very least it will do no good, and at the very worst they could take credit for what you accomplished. But every success which you let your bosses know about is another pretty posy you've planted in your bonnet.
- *Become a Real Person.* You know you're a person, but they think you're just a "temp." I had this problem at Random House, where I sensed I was getting nowhere with the human resource woman because she thought I was just a dull workaholic. I quickly changed her perception of me when I started mentioning my after-work activities — Rollerblading, Jet Skiing, baking a delicious pecan pie, various girlfriends I was dating, and my weekend adventures. Casually, I brought up things like these in conversation. Pretty soon she saw me in a whole new light. Not only did she actively campaign for me to fill a job vacancy (indeed I was awarded the job)— but she also started setting me up on dates with girls she knew!

Gather Recommendations

When you leave a particularly wonderful temping experience, be sure to ask your boss for a recommendation letter, or at the very least, ask your boss if you may use him or her as a reference when applying for a job. Be sure to write down your boss's name, title, and phone number. It's a lot easier to collect recommendation letters, names, and phone numbers on your last day of a job, than it is to crawl back a few months later when you can barely remember what you did for the company, let alone what anybody's name was there.

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You and Your Agency

If your goal is to achieve a permanent job, I recommend you tell that to your counselor at the temp agency. Say straight out, "I'm looking for a permanent job." They'll help you. They'll place you in temp-to-perm positions when they can, and they'll be understanding when you turn down their job offers because you have interviews to go on.

There might be counselors at the agency who can critique your résumé and cover letters, and offer advice on how to improve them. Especially if the agency has a perm division, there will usually be someone there knowledgeable enough to give some savvy opinions. Be warned — those career counselor types tend to be ultra-harsh. Undoubtedly the résumé you think is perfect will be garbage in their eyes. Listen to their advice carefully, don't take it personally, and follow whatever they say that sounds reasonable.

Some temp agencies scare you with rules about accepting permanent job offers from companies. You're not supposed to accept job offers without telling your agency, because technically the temp agency is your official employer, and they're supposed to receive money if they place you in a position. **My advice:** Always be honest with your temp agency. If the company is willing to hire you but they're not willing to pay the temp agency their finder's fee, then do you really want to work for that company? If they're willing to screw your agency, you'd better believe they're willing to screw you, too.

Résumé Tricks

If you're looking for a permanent position, you'll need a résumé. Many temp-to-perm jobs require the temp agency to

forward your résumé to the company. After job hunting unsuccessfully for a while, I found out the hard way that being honest on my résumé got me nowhere. It was only when I became *deceptive* that I started getting job offers. It is an insane, illogical system in which we are forced to search for jobs. If you want to beat the job-hunting system you've got to know how to manipulate it to your advantage.

I became extremely disappointed with the job-hunt system because although my credentials are excellent, my résumés ended up in the trash time after time. But slowly I started to learn what I was doing wrong, and after letting several job counselors criticize my résumés, I finally found out how to write a winning résumé. Now when I send out résumés I'm getting back lots of requests for interviews. In fact, from the last batch of six résumés I've won five interviews. Five out of six ain't bad, huh? Here's how I did it:

Résumé Trick #1

No Gaps

If you've got gaps on your résumé, you're screwed. It could be something as innocent as an illness or injury, but the employer will throw your résumé in the trash because he fears the worst. It's discrimination. It's terribly unfair. That's why we have to sometimes break the rules. I had this problem on my last job search because I had taken off a few months to finish researching and writing a book. **Solution:** Instead of putting my last job as Oct 1996-January 1997, I put it down as Oct 1996-Present. When I went on interviews, I would be asked, "So, you're still temping at this company?" And I would respond, "Oh, no, actually that's an old résumé. I was so excited when I saw your ad I just mailed out the only rés-

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umé I had available!” That accounted for the lost time after January 1997 without throwing undue suspicion on myself. If the gaps in your résumé go back a few years, you may have to make up a fake job and fake references to fill in the lost time.

Résumé Trick #2

Focus on the Job

Your entire résumé should be focused exclusively to the kind of job you wish to pursue. If you have an area of expertise or experience that has nothing to do with the job, then remove it from your résumé. I made the mistake of thinking that employers would be impressed by credentials and by some of the “cool” things I’ve done. Uh-uh. Remember, your potential employer, whomever he or she is, is a stupid moron. They aren’t smart enough to read through a big list of your accomplishments and deduce that you are a wonderful person for them to hire. You have to weed out your list so that it only reflects the current job at hand. For example, I’ve worked in book publishing in the sales department and editorial department. When I apply for a sales job, I remove the editorial stuff from the résumé, and build up my sales experience. The entire résumé is *completely rewritten* for every job I apply for. And I get results. **Problem:** Your counselor probably requested a résumé from you when you signed up with the agency. Now she will send out that same résumé to every temp-to-perm job that you express interest in. That’s a problem because you don’t want her sending out the same exact résumé for every job! **Solution:** If your counselor mentions a temp-to-perm job that sounds appealing, tell her you’re interested, but will have to tailor your résumé to the

job. Find out as much information as you can about the job and the company. Rewrite your résumé on the job that day, print it out, and bring it to her at the end of the day. Since she's in the business of employment, she should hopefully appreciate your job-search savvy.

Résumé Trick #3

Skills

Your résumé has to have a skills section on it. You should list any skills that are relevant to the job, and leave off any skills that are irrelevant. If you're replying to a job ad in the newspaper, make sure you list all the skills listed in the newspaper ad. Here's a sample of a good skills section:

Skills: Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Windows 95

Typing: 75 wpm

Keep it short and simple. Leave off stuff that's potentially embarrassing or makes you look like a fool. One time I saw a résumé where one of the skills was "fax machine." If you have to announce that you know how to use a fax machine, then surely your proficiency level must be pretty low.

Résumé Trick #4

Know When to Admit It

Job-seeking temps are never quite sure if they should admit temping on their résumé. Here's how I handle it. If the temp job lasted three months or less, I mention briefly that it's a temp job. (For example, "Proctor & Gamble, Temp job, March 1992-May 1992..."). Otherwise the employer might think I got fired after only three months.

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Never belittle the fact that you're a temp. Say it with confidence, so the employer has confidence in you. If the temp job lasted many months or years, remember the adage "experience is experience." It doesn't matter if you earned that experience as a temp or a permanent employee; you're better off not mentioning the temp thing at all. If you've held many temp jobs, an alternative is to list the temp agency as your employer for that period of time, and then list the skills and experience you've acquired while working there. The one time I might make a bold point of proclaiming I'm a temp is in my cover letter when occasionally I'll mention that I've enjoyed learning new skills while temping, but now I'm eager to take on a permanent position.

Finally, if you have any temp-to-perm jobs to put on your résumé, consider combining the length of those jobs into one mega-job. If you temped for three months and then were hired for three months, but then were fired soon after, you might consider putting down the full six months together as one job on your résumé. A six-month job looks a wee more stable than two three-monthers.

Strengthen Your Bridges

When you land your permanent position, be sure to send a thank-you card to your counselor at the agency. Thank her for helping you during your time of unemployment. Thank her for hooking you up with the job, for building your skills, or whatever you can dream up to fill a thank-you card. You might even send a box of gourmet cookies she can share with her office. There's nothing like strengthening the bridges you form with other people in your life, because you never know when you'll have to rely on them again in the future.

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Sneaking In Personal Activities

I love temping at these cushy jobs where I don't have to do anything, because I can fill my day with personal activities. Some of these activities are personally enriching and fulfilling. Others are mundane tasks that I'd rather do on the job than in my private life.

Credit card bills, for instance. Every month I get several credit card bills. I have an envelope full of receipts that I've collected over the course of the month, and I have to go through that envelope, pull out the receipts, and make sure every item on the bill matches a receipt. (If you don't do this, you may be paying too much. I've found bogus charges on my credit card bills which I promptly disputed and had removed.) After going through the charges, I shred the receipts so no one can read them, write out a check, and mail it off. All this takes up a lot of time. That's why I love being able to do it on the job. Why should I have to waste my precious at-home time doing boring stuff like that? It's so much better to get paid to sit at a temp job and do my credit card bills!

I also go through my other bills while on temp jobs. I balance my checkbook. I've even done my income tax on the job. I find it repulsive that we waste away our free time on activities such as these. It helps to be able to get paid to do them.

The One Biggest Mistake Most Temps Make

There is one mistake almost every temp I've ever met does wrong. I used to make this mistake too, until I came to a realization one day. You see, when I started doing tempwork,

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there would come a point in the day when I'd finished all my work, or I never had any work to begin with, or the boss told me to sit tight until something came up. That's when I would look around the office for something to read or to do. Within five minutes I would be bored out of my mind.

The next day I would have the same problem. I didn't have any work to do, and I would find myself sitting there staring at a wall, trying to occupy my time somehow. "Why do I always get into this boring mess?" I asked myself. Then it hit me: I get into this problem because the only time I think about the problem is when it's occurring. But by that time it's too late. I realized that from now on, I have to *pack stuff to do the night before*.

That night I went home and put a paperback book in my bookbag. The next day when I came into work, I was prepared for the inevitable downtime.

Pretty soon I found that one book wasn't enough, because I had enough free time during the day to read through an entire book. Soon I was packing two books. I'd pack some magazines. Now I pack all sorts of paperwork, errands, to-do lists, phone numbers to call, action notes to myself, and complicated forms like credit card bills and tax worksheets.

Find a bookbag, backpack, briefcase, large pocketbook, or shoulder bag. It should be somewhat professional-looking. I use a blue L. L. Bean bookbag. I'm so glad that backpacks have come into vogue lately with all age groups, because they really are wonderful to carry around a lot of stuff in. (Oh yeah, that's another thing. You have to bring a big bookbag to carry home all the free stuff you want to take.)

Personally, I always make sure I have a computer disk in my bookbag. That way if I'm temping somewhere and they

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have interesting files on their computer, or if I download something from the Internet, I can copy it onto my disk and bring it home with me.

The key is to prepare the night before. Whenever I'm temping I still see plenty of temps who go in bare-handed. Time after time they go into temp jobs with nothing to do, then they complain how bored they are. Guess what? If you're bored that means you're a boring person. But if you prepared the night before with stuff to work on — you're pretty smart. Remember this — *the night before* — pack your bag with stuff to do!

What Else Can You Pack?

When I get home from work each night, I empty out my bag, put away everything I've taken from the office, and everything I've worked on during the day. Then it's time to pack it full with stuff for tomorrow. I pack all the stuff that I don't want to waste my time doing at home, and would rather do on company time and get paid for it:

- *My mail.* I take the mail and throw it into my bag. That'll keep me occupied for 15 minutes or so. It's mostly bills anyway, so that's why I also pack:
- *My checkbook.* I also have my credit cards with me in case there's anything I want to order from catalogs I got in the mail.
- *Pamphlets, free newspapers, fliers.* I collect lots of free literature that I pick up at bookstores, museums, libraries, and places that hold seminars and various events. I'm a very active person who likes to attend lots of lectures, and parties and classes. Temping gives me an opportunity to read through all the literature I pick up from different

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places, and learn what's going on. I go through the listings of art films, free concerts, group meetings, and other special goings-on, and share that info with my friends so we always have neat things to do.

- *Disks that need to be scanned.* If I have computer disks whose origins are uncertain, I'd rather scan them for viruses on office computers than my own. Who knows if that mystery disk will eat my hard drive?
- *Stuff that needs to be printed.* I'll pack disks containing documents that need to be printed out, such as letters to editors, correspondence, and heaps and heaps of e-mail I've accumulated and been meaning to sort through.
- *Anything that needs to be photocopied.*
- *Anything you need to fax out.*
- *Web pages.* My sister is always telling me to "check out this neat-o web page," or I find web pages in mags that seem intriguing. All these scraps of papers and ads ripped from magazines go into the bookbag, so I can devote a portion of my day to net surfing.
- *Phone numbers.* I put in names and phone numbers of people I have to call. Problem with my junker car? The mechanic's number goes into the bag. IRS on my back? Their number goes in too. I planned a whole vacation at temp jobs just by making sure I had the proper phone numbers with me for hotel, train, and the events I wanted to attend when there.
- *Forms.* Sometimes you need to fill out forms, such as insurance forms, applications, or contest entries. Pack these things, because you're sure to have plenty of time to work on them at your cushy temp job the next day.

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- *Addresses and letter kit.* If there are letters I want to write, I have to have the addresses to send them to. Sometimes I'll also pack a "letter kit" containing all I need to send a letter: an envelope, a stamp, and perhaps special paper. On the other hand, many times I don't pack any of that, and let the office supply it for me.

These are just some of the many personal activities that I try to take care of on the job. It all boils down to thinking things through the night before. Get this stuff together, and then tomorrow on the job, if you happen to have nothing to do, simply open your bag, reach in, and pull out something to occupy your time. By day's end your whole entire to-do list will be done!

Pursuing Your Dreams

Working for a corporation is a horrible thing. It eats away your life. That's why we should constantly keep in mind that at the heart of our existence is our life, and we are responsible for living our lives to the fullest. Your boss doesn't care about your life. A corporation you work for certainly does not. If you're not careful, your life and thoughts will become as cold and hard as the aluminum ductwork that winds its way through the spiritless buildings we are forced to inhabit every day.

Then there are those who fight to take back the life that the office steals from them. People like Stan, a guy I met at one temp job who worked his way up from the mailroom into the cushiest permanent job imaginable. His boss lets him come and go as he pleases, he doesn't have any dress code to conform to, takes several smoke breaks a day, and has plenty of vacation time which he takes full advantage of. But what sets Stan apart from the others in his company was that he takes advantage of his downtime to work on a fantasy novel that he hopes someday will be published. He still makes sure to get all his work done, and he does a very good job of it. That's what allows him the free time to pursue his personal goals. In this chapter we will explore how temping allows you to pursue all kinds of ambitions.

Exploring Our World

I've always seen temping as a wonderful opportunity to educate myself. I've read hundreds of books and magazines of all sorts while temping. At some jobs I've plowed through

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a book and a half a day! At most jobs I've gotten impressive comments from passersby who notice the books I'm reading and applaud me for my smarts. (Of course, sometimes they catch me reading a piece of junk, and that doesn't look too hot.)

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Young & Rubicam,
ad agency, 15\$/hour
(Day 2). Another do-
nothing job. Faxing
out résumés and
writing today.

At some temp jobs they don't want you reading. Receptionist jobs can be that way. I had a temp job at AT&T as one of the vice presidents' assistants, where for the last hour of the work day I was required to sit from 5 to 6 pm and do nothing — and I was not allowed to read! The reasoning, according to the other assistants, who unfortunately signed my timesheet, was that the vice president often had clients coming in, and it was improper for them to see someone reading at their desk. This shows you how stupid some people are! Was it more proper for clients to see me sitting and doing nothing? Playing with paperclips? Shooting target practice with rubberbands? Anyway, I'd already been temping and reading on the job for a month when this rule came down, and during that time the vice president had seen me reading every night! Why, I pleaded, wasn't I allowed to read when even the vice president himself didn't care? Naturally they didn't have a good answer for this, but luckily they all went home at 5, so I was completely able to ignore their stupid rule and read anyway. If you have the problem of not being allowed to read on the job, you can instead usually get away with doing your own paperwork, writing, or phone calls. Searching the web can be another way of learning about the world on the job.

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It's funny that they criticized my reading on the job, because the V.P. himself was a big reader, and one evening one of the other executives praised me for a book I was reading. (It was a stupid book on how to write creative fiction.) "Wow," she exclaimed, "I've never seen anyone make the effort to learn how to write well!" She then went on exalting the virtues of being able to write, and how smart I was for trying to improve my skills. Sure she was condescending, but it got me in her good graces. The lesson is you should read on the job, or at least bring a book with you and keep it on your desk — but make sure it's something intellectual that will impress the hell out of them.

Temping lends itself well to anyone in school or thinking about returning to school. Raul was someone who needed some extra cash for school, so he took on a job with the famous Pinkerton Detective Agency. It wasn't as glamorous as he thought it would be, because he ended up as a night watchman at a warehouse. He loved it! He got paid to sit there all night, do his homework, and study. Temping is handy for students who need a quickie job for spring break, winter break, or the summer, or have a day off from school each week.

I applied for the GRE test and studied for it, all at temp jobs. In fact I had an extended conversation with my boss at Lucent Technologies when he noticed me reading the Princeton Review book to up my score. He didn't mind I was doing that on the job. Instead he expressed interest in my plans for the future.

There are all kinds of learning opportunities on the job, too. Some companies sponsor classes or lectures in which

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you can participate. I've temped at several companies with full-sized libraries right inside the building.

Educating yourself at temp jobs can mean anything from reading books to conducting scientific experiments. I'm not kidding! I love science, and I've actually conducted experiments on the job! For instance, one time at a two-day job at Young & Rubicam, the ad agency, I noticed a particular phenomenon pertaining to after-images in my peripheral vision. I proceeded to examine this phenomenon fully over that day and the next. While you probably can't set up bubbling beakers of fluids on Bunsen burners, perhaps you too can conduct investigations into whatever interests you in this wonderful world.

Write a Book

Amy was a temp whom I met when she replaced me at the AT&T job (where I was not allowed to read). I was to train her in the job, which involved a teensy bit of work. Amy was smart and funny, and had traveled the world in years past, before lack of money caught up with her. She told me she started writing a book about her adventures, and I encouraged her to do so. "At this job," I told her, "if you're organized you can get your work done before lunch every day. Sometimes there's no work at all to do. Then go off to lunch. When you come back, you have the rest of the day to yourself." It was a three-month job. "So if you start now, by the end of the assignment your book will be completed." She loved the idea! The next time I saw her was when I snuck back into the place to make hundreds of photocopies and computer printouts on the office equipment. When I walked into the room I saw that Amy was playing computer Solitaire.

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“How’s the book?” I asked her. I didn’t have to ask. I saw what was happening. She wasn’t disciplined. She was lazy. She didn’t really believe she could do it, so she didn’t even try. I thought it was pretty sad that she would be wasting three months of her life playing stupid computer games and goofing off. But that’s her prerogative.

You can write a book on the job. I know, because that’s what I’m doing now!

Pursue a Sideline

One of my favorite activities to do while working as a temp is to pursue a sideline job — on the job! For instance, sometimes I do a little computer consulting for people on the side, and sometimes I can do that work on the job, while at temp jobs. It’s the best! I’m getting paid \$X an hour for temping, plus on top of that I’m billing my client for the computer consulting! The best part of all is since I’m doing both jobs simultaneously, it wastes less of my life away. When I go home at 5, I’m free to play, party, relax, skate, hang out, or do whatever I want, since my other obligations are finished already.

Sandy was a temp who also did one of those jobs “stuffing envelopes” that she found in the back of a magazine. I think it was a scam and she didn’t really get much money out of it, but she was happy, and she was thrilled that she could stuff her envelopes while getting paid to do nothing at Prudential.

Allison worked in a graphics arts company, and charged her friends \$50 to make fake ID on the equipment she had at her disposal. You can start your own sideline biz typing up résumés, making cold calls to sell a product, or freelance copy editing at the temp desk.

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Start Your Own Business

If your dream is to start your own business, it's handy to be temping because you can do so much of the preparation and planning while on temp jobs. It all starts by reading books on business and accounting, and you'll want to pore over insiders' tales of how they made it in the business. Do research on the Internet into your business area, and see what your potential competition is up to. Having a cushy temp job means having your own cubicle or office from which to schedule appointments, place phone calls, and fill out the paperwork. You can write up a business plan while on the job. When all that is done, make sure to steal all the office supplies and equipment you'll need to get your business off the ground. Why the hell should you waste your money on stuff like Phone Message Pads and manila envelopes, when you can pilfer them from a big company which will never miss them anyway?

Become a Hollywood Screenwriter

After seeing a number of great independent films recently, I got the crazy idea into my head that I'd like to try writing a screenplay. I know, I know — Los Angeles is filled with screenwriters: screenwriter/waiters; screenwriter/taxi cab drivers; screenwriter/hair dressers; screenwriter-slash-everythings. Nevertheless, I thought it would be fun to learn how. I borrowed a lot of how-to-do-it movie books from the library: Those books taught me the basics. I also learned a lot by reading great screenplays, primarily the *Pulp Fiction* screenplay, to learn the craft. I read all that over the course of a stint at a music mag and then a subsequent job at Lucent Technologies. Later, while temping at AT&T, I was relaxing

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in their beautifully lush green atrium, admiring the cascading waterfalls and foliage, when suddenly the perfect idea for a screenplay dashed into my head! I found a stack of index cards in the supply room and started writing out scenes the way the books had taught me. By the end of the day I had the movie plotted out. Over the course of subsequent temp jobs I've been able to flesh out the script. I still don't think it's producible material yet, and I know the script will probably never be produced, but I know that when the time comes to take a shot at it, I'll be sitting in some temp job somewhere, using their computers, printers, and fax machines to send out my script to movie agents and production companies.

Acting

At one of the ad agencies I temped at, I noticed everyone fawning over Bradley, another temp who didn't seem so special to me. I started talking to him to find out what the big deal was. Turns out the guy had just come back from a year in Orlando, Florida, where he had performed in some of the live stage shows in Disney World and MGM Studios. He was auditioning for several commercials, and had just gotten a new set of photos made up for his portfolio. He told me he was an in-house temp. That is, instead of temping for an agency, he temped for the company itself, who placed him each day within the company on an as-needed basis. He loved the flexibility of temping. Temping allowed him to take a year off, move to Florida, and then move back a year later and pick up the job right where he left off. Temping allowed him to skip a day of work if something more life-fulfilling arose (such as an audition). And because he was temping at an ad agency, he was building a valuable list of contacts which he

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could use to possibly make his way into TV commercials. "I'll never go back to being a waiter again," he said. The two of us temps didn't do anything the whole day. The last time I saw him, as I was walking out the door, he was using the office phone to call his agent.

Travel

I've always loved to travel, ever since I was a boy, when my family criss-crossed the country by car. I loved visiting new places and learning about the world. But it seems that as we grow up, more and more responsibilities require us to stay attached to one place, to limit our scope of the world. Temping affords us a means of traveling around. Since we're not bound to a desk for 40 years, and since there are temp agencies all over the country, we can pick up and take off whenever we wish. Ask your temp agency where their branch offices are located. Anyplace exciting? Most agencies can transfer your files around to their other offices. Even if the files can't be transferred to where you're going, undoubtedly there are temp agencies there. At your current temp job, use your free access to the World Wide Web to seek out fun places to visit. Most cities have web pages of their own, which list special events, attractions, hotels, and concerts. You can even print out a map of the area so you'll know your way around. Since you're not tied down by a permanent job, shouldn't you make use of your freedom, at least for a little bit? Even if only for a weekend excursion, temping can take you there!

Art

Piyush is a friend of mine who takes nature photography, but hates being cramped up in a stuffy office all day while he

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misses the best sunlight and the beautiful outdoors. How can he pursue his outdoor passion at an inside job? Obviously he can't work inside and take photos outside at the same time, but he uses his time in the office to his advantage, by pursuing the aspects of his art which he *can* do inside. He uses office telephones to call galleries and make appointments with places that display artwork. He uses the office computers, scanners, and printers to create flyers and posters that will advertise his artistic events. He even manages to design his own web page, announcing his photography exhibitions, all on company time. "I love how this boring corporation I work for unknowingly pays me to pursue my creative artwork!" he exclaims with a wicked grin.

Win Your Dream Job

It's so tough finding a good job nowadays, think of how nice it would be to have your own private office with your own personal computer, printer, and fax machine at your disposal, all for the purpose of getting yourself hired at your new dream job. And on top of all that, imagine getting paid money to conduct your job search! That's what it amounts to when you conduct your job search at a temp job. Many of the temps I've met used their free time to pursue a permanent position. This includes myself, for I'm hoping to time the conclusion of this writing project with the start of a new permanent job. (Not that I don't love temping...but enough is enough already!)

Enriching Your Life

Life is for living, living as fully and richly as you possibly can. Sometimes sentiments like that are hard to believe when

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you find yourself slogging into the shower at 6 am to get ready to go to work. But by thinking about the pleasures you want to indulge in, and the enriching and uplifting pursuits you want to explore, you can find a way to incorporate those pursuits into temping. Whether you wish to write a book, start your own business, go back to school, learn about the world, move on to a higher-paying job, or a dream that's as unique as you are — temping allows you a way to pursue your dreams and get paid to do so.

Free Stuff

“You didn’t take *enough!*” my mom proclaims. I get into this conversation with her whenever I mention the first job I took out of college. “The way they treated you, you didn’t take enough from them!”

She’s right. I was forced to stay long hours with no over-time, gave them all my loyalty and love, and was eventually dumped from the job after doing an excellent job of completing all their assignments. That was one hell of a learning experience: That no matter how good a job you do, they’ll find some way of getting rid of you to save money. That’s why no matter what job you’re in, no matter how secure the job seems, no matter how *nice* the people are — you have to screw them. You just have to. Because, believe me, they’ll screw you without a second thought.

After being fired, I worked at internships and temp jobs, and eventually landed another job at a publishing house. I met a temp there named Vincent. Vincent worked hard because he was trying to score himself a full-time position. He also spent a lot of time writing up résumés and cover letters, and using the company’s fax machines to fax them out and its phone lines to make interview appointments. I admired him for this! But a few months later the division was being shut down, and we were all losing our jobs, temps and perms alike. Some people had worked there over 25 years and were losing their jobs without any warning. Vincent looked stunned. “I was so naïve!” he said. “Look how they treated all of you, and here I’ve been bringing in my own paper every day to make print-outs!” He was trying to be such a good

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worker that he didn't even want to use the company's printer paper for his own personal use!

Here are the rules of free stuff: take a little each day. A little adds up to a lot over time. One pen per day, per job, is fine. Besides, you never know when you'll walk in and find out you've been canned. It's tough to cart out truckloads the last day, when you're under watchful eye. You should have been stealing stuff all along. (Am I a bad influence, or what!)

I recently decided that there are certain commodities I will never buy again for the rest of my life. There are certain things I just don't want to waste my money on! So I decided that if ever I need any of this stuff, I'll just get a temp job for a day and take what I need from my employer.

Paper Products

There is no reason to purchase paper products. I went shopping for food the other day and saw someone spending \$1.44 for a package of napkins, and I thought: *How silly!* Why should I waste my hard-earned (!) money on something as stupid as paper napkins, when I can waste it on good stuff like pastries, liquor, and having fun! (\$1.44 may not sound like much, but let's convert it into food dollars. \$1.44 saved is equivalent to buying two tomatoes, let's say, that will last through a week's worth of sandwiches. Or even better, it will buy me a packet of seeds that will create a garden full of tomatoes or squash to last half the year.) Napkins are one of those things you can take a handful of each day, and over the course of time those little handfuls add up to lots. When you eat your lunch each day, grab a bunch of napkins and store them away. Soon you'll have more than you know what to do with.

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I did the same with copier paper. A few years ago I was busy writing some books, so I needed a large supply of printer paper to print out on. (Yes, usually I do all my print-outs at the office, but I was temping someplace with an incompatible system.) Each day I slipped one ream of copier paper into my bookbag. Sometimes I slipped two in there. That was several years ago, and I've still got a Great Wall of Paper stacked up in my closet at home that would've cost me over a hundred dollars to buy at Office Depot.

Rolls of paper towels can be swiped from the kitchen area, or from the janitor's closet. In large office buildings they may have dozens of kitchens and dozens of janitor's closets. Seek out supply sources far away from your work area, so you don't deplete your own resources.

Toilet paper is another one of those items I don't feel like buying. Why should I waste my money on something that's just gonna be wiped on my ass and flushed down the toilet?! That's like flushing my money away! I'd rather take rolls of toilet paper from the workplace. Sometimes they put out extra rolls of T.P. in the bathrooms which you can easily swipe. Other times you need to sneak into the janitor's closet and take a few. Or if you notice one of the cleaning crew moving about, slip a roll off her cart when she's not looking. It's best to do these things on your way out the door at the end of the day. Put on your coat and your backpack, then slip into the bathroom, kitchen, or closet before heading out the door.

Free Eats!

Most people hate office parties, but I kind of like them. They're great if you're a temp: You're being paid to attend a party! It also gives you a free meal, and you can sneak back

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into the room after the party is over and siphon off the leftovers to make up your lunches and dinners for the next few days.

There's usually free food left over from meetings, too. Meetings are usually good for sandwiches and cans of soda. Take all you can and stuff them in your backpack. Remember, you don't have to attend a meeting to eat its food. Just sneak in before the meeting starts, or after it's over, and help yourself. Sometimes when a meeting's finished, the food is moved to a kitchen area for others to grab. Otherwise, the cafeteria crew comes along with a cart and cleans up the extras. Learn the procedure at your place of work so you'll know exactly where to go and what to do to get the free food you deserve.

Most offices have tons of free food lying around. At one company there were refrigerators filled with bottles of juice and sodas. You know, I left at the end of each day with my pockets and bags stuffed with beverages. At one ad agency where I temped, all the secretaries had a huge drawer full of cans of soda, and other drawers full of cookies, candy bars, popcorn, Fig Newtons, granola, chocolate, trail mixes, crackers, and other snack items. That was the best! Every morning I was there early filling up my bag, and throughout the day I would add even more stuff to my score. A lot of those snacks traveled the country with my parents when they took a road trip to Las Vegas.

If they're stupid enough to trust you... Some companies put you on the honor system. What they don't know is that you're not particularly honorable. For instance, they put coin boxes near the coffee, and expect you to pay. When I temped at a construction company, they had a cooler full of drinks which we were *supposed to* pay for (but maybe I forgot to

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pay every once in a while). At the same place the cafeteria workers would occasionally leave their posts, especially during off-hours. We were *supposed to* leave our money on the countertop next to their cash registers. I remember smirking one time when I saw someone plunk down a nickel for the empty cup she was taking. Why bother? At another company there were cardboard cartons stacked up on top of the vending machines. One day I got curious and looked inside — surprise! — they were filled with all the snacks and sodas that were in the machines! What's the point of putting money into a machine when you can just pull candy out of a box? *If they're stupid enough to trust you... they've got to live with the consequences of their stupidity.*

I've had pretty good luck carting off bottles of wine and beer. One time I replaced a woman who had just left the company. She left behind all her going away presents, including one bottle of red and one bottle of white wine in her office. At another company I found a stash of bottles with distinctive labels that were given out as Christmas gifts. In an ad agency I found a table stocked with promotional bottles of beer that had been gifts from a local radio station.

One last hint you should know about: if you can get into the cafeteria after-hours, there may be food that's up for grabs. In certain companies I was able to exit through the cafeteria each night as I was leaving. The cafeteria would be dark and deserted, and was a perfect opportunity to snatch condiments, packets of pickle relish (which I love), and the occasional food items which were not properly put away.

It's easy to collect tons of free food in offices, and that's why you'll need to know about:

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Keeping in Shape

Some companies have an exercise room you can use. If they have an exercise room, they probably have showers you can use too. (Free soap and water!) Some companies even have lockers where you can store your belongings.

I've never temped at a firm where I was actually allowed to use the exercise room, because I was not a full-time employee. But guess what? I used it anyway! No one noticed or cared. Sometimes you will be required to sign a form which states you will not sue the company should you accidentally fly off the treadmill and slam into a wall. Big deal. Go ahead and sign it, play it safe, and have yourself a blast at their expense.

If the company is located on a "campus," they might have a paved path for jogging and biking. Some corporate campuses provide wooded exercise paths or even nature trails for their workers' enjoyment. This is all very nice, and you should make use of whatever's offered. Other places have a basketball net set up in the parking lot, or perhaps the company runs a softball or volleyball team with which you can get involved, if only for a game or two.

If you're into in-line skating, as I am, you might be able to use the company as a skating area. At one place I temped, some of the younger employees would stick around after hours and Rollerblade around the parking lot. At another place I snuck in when everyone was gone to skate on the smooth hallways and industrial carpet. That was the best skating I've ever done!

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Having Fun

I'd like to point out all the other kinds of free fun to be had while working at various companies. It's especially good to temp around Christmastime, when you can collect gifts from co-workers, and attend party after party after party. At some behemoth companies they hold catered parties to celebrate sales achievements and new product launches. I always make sure to crash the parties of other departments and branches!

At one book publishing company they had a summer picnic fiesta, complete with a giant tent, gambling games, prizes to win, raffles, barbecued Cajun cuisine, and musical entertainment. They shut down the office early that day to have fun under the big top. Did I feel guilty about being paid \$10.25 an hour to attend a picnic? Not on your life!

Some of the most fun I've had at one job was when I met up with a girl in the mailroom and we gave each other forklift rides and organized handcart races all around the office. Stay happy, keep a joyous attitude, and you'll find yourself having fun no matter what temp job you find yourself in.

High-Tech Stuff

A lot of high-tech items can be had for free from the offices in which you temp. Most companies are bad about keeping track of their high-tech computer equipment. It's the most expensive gear in the office, and yet most employees know nothing about it. That's good for you, sucks for them.

Steven, a temp at AT&T, liked to borrow the laptop and case which were in the cubicle next to his. He would use it at night or on the weekends, and return it the next work day.

Companies often buy new computers "with all the works," but when they set them up, neglect to put everything on it.

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After all, most corporate computers don't require sound cards, speakers, or joysticks. That stuff ends up in a box somewhere, and is soon forgotten. **Hint:** Take it. It's better off being used by you than uselessly stored away in a dusty box. You can find boxes with extra phones, cables, disks, power cords, extension cords, keyboards and mice, and all sorts of miscellaneous high-tech stuff, just waiting for the taking. Find that treasure trove hidden away in a closet or shelf and it will be years (if ever) before any of it is noticed missing. I've even procured modems and microphones that way.

At times I've found myself temping in offices that use the same brand of computer printer as I have at home. When I find my toner cartridge running low, I simply take a spare one from the office. Even more fun: bring my drained cartridge into the office, install it into their printer, and take home their good cartridge. Hey, don't look at me like that, those things are expensive!

July 10
Condé Nast,
women's magazine,
13\$/hour.

I've also been able to purchase hundreds of dollars worth of computer software for \$5 or less. Here's how the scam works. Call up a company like Microsoft and tell them you just bought one of their packages, but the disks are corrupted. Ask how you can get replacement disks. If the company's stupid, they'll just mail you new disks. If they're a little smarter they'll ask to see proof of purchase — a serial number, photocopy of the manual, or a boxtop. Naturally you have that at hand, since you've looked around the office and found the instruction manuals in the cardboard box on someone's shelf. The serial

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number might be printed on the box or on the manual, or it might be found in the software itself. In a few weeks the software will be yours. Make sure you place the phone call from the office you're temping at, because after all, you don't want to pay the long-distance charges. This scam doesn't work for every company, but you can get a lot of free software that way.

Sometimes this whole procedure can be bypassed by simply copying the software off the computer. However, some software will "notice" that it's been copied off the computer and won't work once you copy it onto your computer at home. You can also look around for disk storage boxes containing the original installation disks which you can take home, install, and return the next day. Sometimes the only installation disks you can find are older versions of the software. **Fix:** Use the same scam as described above! Call the company and say you want to upgrade to the new version. You might have to send a photocopy of the first disk to prove you really do own the software. With that proof at hand, your new found free, or nearly free, software will be in your mailbox in a matter of days.

Information

I always walk my fingers through everyone's Rolodex, collecting names, numbers and addresses of anyone who might be helpful to me in any way. This is usually most interesting when I'm temping at a book publisher or magazine, because then you can often find famous people in their Rolodexes. But it can be useful for other businesses as well.

I also like rifling through co-workers' file cabinets. You find cool stuff in there: other people's résumés, old college

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papers, clipped magazine articles, and secret memos that were never supposed to see the light of day.

It's great being a temp if you've got something to advertise. Every day I try to make 50 copies of fliers advertising my books. Then I can distribute the flyers wherever I go. Also remember to steal plenty of thumb tacks with which to hang your fliers on bulletin boards. At one place I used the color copier to make a snazzy full-color copy of the front cover of the book. Then I ran those same pages through the black-and-white copier, which copied the sales pitch and order form on the reverse side. Plenty of self-publishing moguls use office photocopiers to produce their own newsletters and zines, too.

Redemptions and Rebates

My mom's a rebate freak, so I always make sure to send her UPC codes from the boxes of teabags and other products from the office kitchens, meeting rooms, and cafeterias that I visit. Since offices use jumbo-size versions of these products, the UPC codes are worth big redemption bucks.

The recycling bins of offices are filled with cans that can be redeemed for 5¢ or even 10¢ in the right state. I think of it as aluminum cash as I grab the whole entire plastic bag, filled with cans, load them in the trunk of my car, and take off. I don't live in a state where cans are redeemable, but whenever I travel to one that does, it gives me a bunch of extra spending money. Face it, if you don't take those cans, they'll just be pressed and squashed and somebody else will make a profit from them. Who would you rather see make a profit, somebody else — or you?

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Random Freebies

You'll never know all the kinds of free stuff you can find at companies. Sure, there are nifty office supplies such as pens, pads, folders, staplers, staples, tape, tape dispensers, rulers, envelopes, computer disks, Post-It notes, highlighter markers, and sticky labels — all items that I've taken for my own personal use. But you don't have to limit your thinking to just office supplies. There's a whole galaxy of home supplies to borrow!

Need Band Aids? The first-aid kit is your friend! While you're at it, take some bandage tape, Ipecac, aspirin, and all the other groovy stuff in there.

Coat hangers. Silverware. Letter openers. Postage stamps. Plates. Bowls. Glasses. Paper cups. Styrofoam cups. Dishwashing detergent. Drinking straws. Plastic utensils. Mayonnaise, mustard, and ketchup. Salt & pepper shakers. Raid the closets, cafeteria, and kitchenettes of the place. Take a little each day, and it will add up to a lot over time.

I'm thinking of taking another stapler. I want to see if I can convert it into a zip gun. From one company's storeroom I took a bunch of metal clips with magnets attached. A friend of mine who works at the U.N. uses them as nifty holders for his collection of mini flags of the world.

Do whatever is necessary to gain access to the supply room or storeroom. Supply rooms are always brimming with wonderful things that have nothing to do with business. My favorite are the rolls of tickets that are invariably found there. You can use these tickets at county fairs to go on rides, or at club meetings where they have raffles. While you're in the supply closet, fill your backpack with batteries, holiday deco-

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rations, utility knives, lamination plastic, three-hole punchers, label-making systems, and other goodies you'll find.

Light bulb burned out at home? Bring it into the office and switch it with the bulb in someone's desk lamp or floor lamp when they're out to lunch. Great for halogen lights, too.

Like magazines? Many office workers do, but they never read theirs. The magazines end up in the trash. Retrieve them. Read them. Remove the Change of Address cards and redirect the subscriptions to come to your own dwelling instead of their office. They won't miss them. I've noticed that in certain industries (advertising, for instance) workers get dozens of magazines. They won't miss one or two. Or less risky: find order forms for free magazines for industry professionals. All sorts of trade magazines show up at temp jobs, and generally you can get yourself on subscription lists by filling out a card about yourself. (Lie through your teeth.)

I've come home with myriads of free samples and promotional items from companies: magnets, postcards, toys, books, T-shirts, smoke bombs, slide viewers, and newspapers, to name a few. If this list seems haphazard, it's because you never know what free stuff you're going to get!

From the Calvin Klein fashion show I made off with three rolls of professional-quality color film, which had been accidentally dropped onto the floor by photographers as they clicked their cameras at the slinky models. From a financial company I brought home enormous reproductions of U.S. currency, which I gave to my sister who has a collection of "big money."

At some long-term jobs you might have access to the office-supply catalogs. Here's one valuable hint I've learned about office-supply catalogs: they have a lot more in them

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than office supplies! You can order party supplies, tins of cookies or popcorn, stationary, even price markers and label systems for do-it-yourself discounting at retail stores. Again, the key is not to become greedy: when you have to make a legitimate purchase, tack on an extra item that you will take home with you. Depending on the policies of the company, you can get away with murder!

Take from the Temp Agency Too

Don't forget that the temp agency wants to give you free stuff too! At one temp agency they have a strategically placed copy machine which I had fun using early in the morning before anyone else arrived, while waiting standby for a job. Some agencies have informational pamphlets for your reading pleasures. Others have promotional materials (so far I've gotten pens and yo-yos with the agency's logo on it, and city maps, which the agencies supply to temps to help them locate assignments). Read through the literature your temp agency provides, for it may clue you in about special deals, benefits, or bonuses that you can take advantage of as a temp, ranging from training classes, discounted health club memberships, paid vacation after working an ungodly number of consecutive hours, medical and dental benefit programs, and skills training.

Take Advantage of Your Special Privileges

The free stuff you pass by without a second look-see might be golden in the eyes of other people in your life. Ask friends and family what they need, and try to supply it to them. When I temped at a book publisher, I procured vegetarian cookbooks for a leaf-eating friend. At other temp jobs I've taken

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notebooks and red pens for my mother the teacher, and I've helped her out several times with my access to paper cutters and copiers. I took thick black markers for Grandma, who normally pays \$2.09 for the same markers. She uses them to draw huge signs advertising her weekly garage sale. Grandma, who is an ardent dumpster diver, loved the gift more after learning it was contraband stolen from an office. She would've hated for me actually to spend money on them!

My sister loves arts and crafts, and I've been able to provide her with her favorite supplies. She also loved the White-Out, photocopies, gummed erasers, double-sided tape, sticky stuff which she uses to hang posters on her wall, and dry-erase markers which she uses on the message board on her dorm room door. These were all special requests she made, which I mailed to her as care packages (from work, of course), letting the company pay for postage.

Is there a special sadomasochist in your life? How about collecting binder clips to pinch on nipples? Wristpads from computer keyboards are common whipping implements. And I've noticed that cartons of copier paper are bound in plastic strips which would also come in handy to the BD/SM crowd. The even more evil amongst us might like to sell White-Out and erasable markers at bulk discounts to junior high school kids looking for a huff high. The seriously depraved might collect and sell urinal candy as high-priced crystal underarm deodorant.

My point is, you should use whatever privileges you have, while you have them, because you never know when the job will be over and the free stuff will stop rolling in. It's nice to be able to share your free stolen wealth with other people. They will appreciate your letting them in on some of the

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perks of the temping world. You also never know what stuff you'll need in the future that others will be able to provide from their jobs.

Sneaking Back In

This might be a good place to mention the fine art of Sneaking Back In. Many times I've found myself sneaking back into a place I temped at weeks or months earlier. At a national music magazine, I discovered they had a most lovely storeroom filled with neat stuff. I also liked the great responses I got to letters sent out on the magazine's stationary. When my stationary supply ran out, I traipsed into their office, snuck into their storeroom, and made off with a lot more.

Have you ever been walking through the city and needed a rest room? You know how tough it is to find a public rest room in some cities. One day I found myself in need of relief. Luckily, I knew of an office building that was easy to get into nearby! I snuck in and, don't worry, everything came out okay.

Another time I needed to make thousands of computer printouts, which I certainly didn't want to do on my home computer. I determined my best strategy was to use the computers at AT&T where I had temped a few months previously. My friend Steven signed me in as a visitor for just this purpose.

You might not have or need a friend who can get you in. I was able to sneak into the music magazine because while working there I noticed flaws in their security system. The place with the bathroom had guards who didn't care who was walking through the front door. I always try to save my ID

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badges for future use. Make it your duty to notice what kinds of security are in place, and exactly how that security can be defeated. Often it's as simple as signing a guest book and walking in, or slipping through a back door. If you happen to bump into someone you know when you sneak in, tell them you're temping in another part of the building. If it's a planned break-in, make sure to dress appropriately. It might be better to go on Friday when it's "casual day" and not too busy.

Even if you don't need access to the place *now*, you never know what your future holds in store for you. I was temping at a health care center which I found had incredibly lax security. I feel good knowing that any time I need to, I can easily sneak inside, walk up to the second floor, open an unmarked door at the end of the hall, and make off with as many bandages, crutches, hospital garments, drugs, and drug paraphernalia items as I need.

Saving Money

Let's face it, temping pays, but it doesn't pay as well as a full-time job. That's why temps, more than full-time employees, need to watch the money they spend. I don't want to turn this into *The Tightwad Gazette*, but I do want to share some of the tricks I've used to save money while temping.

First of all, as you've guessed by now, I make full use of all freebies that present themselves.

There are also various methods to fake out corporate cafeterias. If a cup of coffee is 80¢ cents, and a delicious pastry is \$2, then simply drop the dessert into a Styrofoam cup, put on the lid, and pay 80¢ cents for it. Another scam: Walk into the cafeteria, pick up a drink or a sandwich

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(something easily portable). Walk around the cafeteria eyeing everything, then leave by the route you entered. There's no security there. No one's looking at you. No one cares.

A white dress shirt can be reworn two or even three days a week in winter, which saves on washing and dry-cleaning costs, and the need for new shirts. Men can wear the same pair of slacks every day of the week (although it's nice to interchange them occasionally with a pair of a different color). Especially if you're in an office by yourself where no one talks to you or gives you work to do — who cares if you're a little wrinkled or a little smelly?

City jobs pay more than the suburbs, but expenses increase too. Watch out for lunch time. It's easy to spend \$8 or \$10 a day on lunch, which really adds up. Remember, you might not be getting much more than that per hour of work. If you spend that much on lunch, it's like working one less hour than you actually put in. That's why I like to ration carefully all the free food I accumulate. A lot of freebie food is delicious and I want to eat it immediately! But I try not to, and I save it to eat over the course of the week. Beverages are very expensive, especially when you consider that you can generally get water or soda for free. If you have to buy lunch, at least don't spend extra money on the drink.

When I bring my own lunch it's usually four or five times less the cost of buying it, and healthier too. As you may have guessed, I'm crazy about food. I just love to eat, and eat a lot, so food makes up a big part of what I spend my money on. I guess that's why I'm focusing so much on it here!

One more thing about lunch: the first day at a new temp job, find out the minimum time you're allowed to put down

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for lunch. At many jobs I put down a half-hour for lunch (even when I took 45 minutes or an hour).

At that fashion show job we took a 45-minute lunch. When I started putting down 45 minutes on my time sheet, one of the other guys said, "Come on, just put down an hour. It's only like \$2 difference!"

"It's *only* \$2? Well if it's *only* two bucks to you, then why don't you *give me* \$2? I'll take \$2 if you don't want it." You think he handed me the loot? Point well made, I thought. Besides, if you give the company \$2 every day for a week it becomes \$10 bucks. Listen, friend, you need that \$2 or \$10 more than the company does. Whose pocket would you rather it be in? That's why you should put down the least lunch time you can get away with, or even none at all. In many of these temp jobs, no one is there looking over your shoulder, or even notices when you've gone and when you come back, so you can really put down anything (within reason) on your timesheet.

You and Your Timesheets

Speaking of timesheets, let's talk about this very important topic. The timesheet is your link between the hours you put in, and the paycheck that comes of it. For some reason temp agencies are stingy with their timesheets. They give you one or two to start, and then they give you one more in every paycheck. Somehow this is never enough. You make mistakes, misplace them, or give them away. You end up without any timesheets, and it's a whole hassle just to get paid. **Solution:** The next time you're in the temp agency office, take a whole handful of timesheets. Take as many as you can get, and put them in your bookbag. I've found it's useful to

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have as many timesheets as possible, because I hand them out to other temps I meet on the job. They're always very appreciative, and I become the big hero for supplying them with timesheets!

At the end of a job (or at the end of the week) you need to get your timesheet signed. Get it signed by your boss, or if he or she isn't there, by someone in human resources. At times I've just gone around to everyone else in the office until someone agreed to sign it. I've never had a problem getting other people to sign my timesheet, even when it was just a secretary.

If you get fired from a job and your timesheet hasn't been signed, give it to your counselor at the temp agency. Remember, the agency doesn't get paid until the timesheet is signed, so it's their responsibility to do something about it. It wasn't your fault you got fired, right? You couldn't help it your boss was a jerk. So just hand your unsigned timesheet to your counselor and let them deal with it. It's their problem now.

Photocopy your timesheet before handing it to the temp agency. The following week when you get your paycheck, compare it to your photocopy and make sure you're getting paid the correct amount. One time I temped someplace where the boss was such an absent-minded jerk that I photocopied my timesheet before *and after* he signed it. The guy was so paranoid that I feared he would accuse me of changing my hours after he signed it. By photocopying the timesheet unsigned *and* signed I had quite enough paperwork to cover my butt.

Be sure you always fill out your timesheets on the job, not on your own time. Photocopy them using the company's equipment. The timesheet is part of your job, so you should

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get paid for doing it. Like they say, time is money. Doubling up on your time, working on personal projects while getting paid for it, and “borrowing” stuff from around the office (also on company time), are the best ways of all to make your earnings work for you.

Temping as a Dating Service

On my very first temp job I learned something very important about temping: *girls temp too*.

Her name was Jessica. A sexy Hispanic *chica* with jet black hair flowing gently around her nicely tanned face and cute little nose. Gorgeous! We had been flirting all day, but it seemed there was always someone else in the room with us. Towards evening as I was about to leave, she tickled her finger up my arm and asked in her baby doll voice, "Will you be coming back tomorrow, Dennis?" You better believe I was!

Actually, I wasn't scheduled to work the next day, but I made arrangements to come in. The next day Jessica and I were working in the same room with two other temps who were discussing their ex-wife and ex-husband. The woman said that she left her husband because he'd slept with his boss. The man said he'd left his wife after she was discovered on her knees in the supply closet with a co-worker. Jessica and I glanced at each other. We needed to find a supply closet. *Fast*.

Well, we never did find a closet in that office, but there were rows upon rows of deserted cubicles, and we found some time to sneak away to the most distant cubes to make out passionately until our absence was noted by an infuriated floor manager. I think the two divorcees were also becoming quite enamored of each other.

If this all sounds like temping is a hotbed of steamy passion — well, I won't go that far, but temping is a great way to meet needy, lonely, unattached people on the fringes of society who will cling to any semblance of affection that you care

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to offer them. If you're not looking for a more substantial relationship than that, then you've got it made.

One of the best things about meeting people this way is the Don Juanian opportunity for romper-rooming in the bedroom that temping affords. Since the job is temporary you need never see the other person again. If you start dating someone you met at one job, you can continue dating him or her while you move onto other jobs and meet and start dating people you meet there. You can have multiple partners and need never worry about their worlds colliding, especially if all three of you use separate temp agencies!

Chemical Bank was the worst temp job I ever experienced. But the first day was magnificent. There was a pretty, young nymphet there — I can't even remember her name. Blonde, perky. I remember sitting at my desk, typing at my computer terminal, when I turned and caught her shifting her gaze away. Another co-worker saw the connection and blurted out, "Ohhh! She likes you!" Later, when she and I were walking back from lunch together, the same co-worker's jaw fell to the floor as he gasped, "You two had lunch together! I've worked here seven years and she's never had lunch with *me!*" Boy, was he jealous that this new guy was making more progress in a day than he'd made in seven years! Ah, but it was those seven years of working together that had done in all chances of winning her over. Why bother with stale bread when she could have fresh meat?

More recently I've met numerous women while waiting for my daily assignments on stand-by in the mornings. Usually I sit quietly and read in the waiting area until my name is called, and I've never even tried to encourage or pursue these women. However, it is undeniable that those stand-by waiting

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rooms are filled with young, unemployed, single men and women who are looking for approval of any form. They believe they're after approval in the career sense, but really they'll take friendship, affection, or sexual approval. And I'm sure you'll be happy to provide any or all kinds of approval to them.

The most extreme case of this was Laura. I met Laura at a long-term temp job at a finance firm. As I walked in the first day, she stood to greet me. Her body was perfect and her blonde hair was really blonde — not bleached like ol' what's-her-name at Chem Bank. It was summertime. She wore a sleeveless white outfit that showed off her beautifully toned arms and legs. She was overly made up, not inexpertly, but deliberately, as if she were planning on a night of raving when the workday was done. Laura was a temp who had worked there the past six months. Now she was moving to a different department in the company, and I was to replace her. I didn't like the sound of that, after all, I wanted to work *with her*, not replace her. Then I found out the good news: even though she was changing departments, all that meant was she was sliding from one desk to another in the same office. And one more thing: I'd be sharing an office with her.

Now this wasn't just any office, this was our own private, secluded office, hidden far back behind the copy room. The door had a lock and only we had the keys. (Okay, the janitor had keys too, but let's not bring him into the picture.) The point is, I found out I would be sharing an office for at least three months with this blonde fountain of gorgeous sensuality. She showed me the ropes the first day. I made advances. She wasn't distant, but she wasn't responding either. I wasn't sure what was going on.

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But then, after the showing of ropes was done, everything changed. We retreated to our private office and began to talk. She giggled as she told me stories from her mischievous past. I tuned up my bad-boy image. She was enthralled, but I was enthralled too. She stood up, walked to the door, and shut it. She came back to her seat and drew it closer to mine. I had her. I knew I had her.

Later I found out Laura was being treated for clinical depression. She had recently suffered the death of her father and the infidelity of an unstable ex-boyfriend. I thought her ex-boyfriend a fool for going after another girl when he had Laura. Each day I couldn't help but smile as I observed Laura showing off her figure in skimpy summer outfits, and combing her fingers through gorgeous hair. She was dropping hints the way bunnies drop babies. I was torn between lust and ethics. Lust, because here I was sharing a room and rapport with a sexy, flirtatious, single girl. Ethics, because I knew I wasn't serious about her, and what right did I have to jerk her around? On the other hand, if I played my cards right she might end up jerking *me* around... that did it. I threw ethics out the door. All's fair in lust and lust. Our attachment escalated. Our private office became a daily love fest. If she saw in me anything other than a casual fling, that was her problem. Caustic, I know, but the tables were turned after we were seeing each other for a while, when I started falling for her. How could I not? I'm a guy after all, and you know how guys get attached so quickly to women.

After several months of passion, we began to drift apart after we both left the company to pursue other jobs, and she went back to school in another state. We still say we're good friends, but I'll probably never see her again.

Enjoy Your Freedom!

Why do I temp? I temp whenever I lose my “real” job, which seems to be often in this age of downsizings, right-sizings, layoffs, and dismissals. I don’t advocate temping for everyone, but if you are temping you should exploit it so you win—not the agencies, not the companies. You.

Temping has its down sides. You’ll have to take care of health coverage yourself, although some agencies are starting to provide plans for their temps. Paid vacations are tough to come by. At most agencies you have to work an impossible number of hours before accumulating enough brownie points to earn vacation pay. It’s better than nothing, but not much better, and if you want it you have to stay with a particular agency or a particular job when you might be better off elsewhere.

July 11
Vanity Fair,
magazine, \$13/hour

On the upside, temping provides the ultimate freedom. How often I’ve decided not to go in to work on some glorious spring day simply because I didn’t feel like it, or I had something better to do, or I felt I could accomplish more by not going in to work than by going in. Remember, work for yourself, not for the company. You don’t need a monstrous corporation to provide work to give you a sense of self-fulfillment. It’s *your* job to make your life worthwhile. Temping, or any work, is not going to make you happy. Happiness comes from self-confidence, self-esteem, and a sense that regardless of your situation, you will see it through and achieve

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your dreams. Or at least start giving your dreams a good shot.

At Chem Bank, that miserable place I temped, I was talking to someone who had just graduated college and gotten a terrible full-time job there. "You're lucky," she said, "you can leave at the end of the week. I've got to stay." She had only been working there a few months. "Why don't you just leave?" I asked her. "I can't," she moaned. She lunged into a million reasons why she must be martyred here when she wished she could leave the company. I didn't understand her reasons at all. They were unconvincing and didn't make sense. The only thing that did make sense from what she told me, were the words: "You're lucky, you can leave." She was right! I had none of her qualms about leaving. Even when they asked me to stay on a second week, I didn't feel obligated to do any more work for them. I was out the door and into the next job. Freedom!

One sun-luscious Friday I was called in to temp at Young & Rubicam, the ad agency, and found myself in one of these cushy, do-nothing jobs. Well, I spent the day reading my supply of magazines, formulating résumés and cover letters for some jobs, and writing a thank-you note for an interview I'd been granted the day before. At about 4:30 pm I was handed a bunch of work to do. I didn't mind doing the work, but it was impossible to finish all that work before 5:00 pm, and from the load of work he was handing me it was looking more like a 10-to-midnight jobber. I told the boss delicately, "You understand there's no way this can be done by 5 pm?" A blank look from him. He had just assumed I would stay late to finish the job because his sorry usual secretary would stay late to finish the job. Yeah, but I wasn't his usual secretary. I

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was a temp. And I didn't hold any brand loyalty to his brand of bossiness. "Don't you — don't you want the money?" he asked incredulously (and I thought a little contemptuously). "That's irrelevant," I told him flatly. "You asked for someone 9 to 5. I'll do as much as I can before 5." I think he was pissed beyond belief, but he didn't show it. I felt like a stinky devil, but there was no reason for me to feel that way: It was he who had given me no work all day until 4:30. My chagrin turned to a grin when I realized I had struck a blow for decency for that poor secretary I was filling in for that day. I felt bad for her! She probably had the same problem every day, but she couldn't just walk out the door at 5 as I could. She would have to stay, and do his shitwork, even if it were a hot summer Friday night. I felt good. I felt like I had taught him a lesson: How dare he squander my talent all day, then dump a load of stuff last minute. Maybe that would teach him to organize his work assignments better next time, and maybe he wouldn't waste his secretary's day with no work and then further waste away her night with unpaid overwork. I hoped, anyway, that he would realize what a jerk he was.

Temping offers you such freedoms. The freedom to walk away from a job you don't like. To walk away at the end of the day. But you must do it tactfully, kindly, nicely. Always be courteous. Remember: always be that professional representative of the temp agency.

Tempwork allows you to live a life of passions. There are temps who stop working every winter to ski, or be with their family. There are temps who stop working in the springtime to go on camping trips. Full-time jobs make us all dull boys, but tempwork allows us to pursue our passions.

The Temp Worker's Guide to Self-Fulfillment

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I remember a summer day of cool breezes, as I, sharply dressed in all black, strolled with a temp buddy through the streets of Manhattan on the way to the Calvin Klein building. We had just finished the fashion-show job, and were going back to have our time sheets signed. As we strode up through Chelsea towards the garment district, my buddy smirked at all the people jumping in and out of trucks delivering merchandise, the ones standing in doorways receiving it, the men with slicked-back hair and tailored suits, the women with shoulder pads the size of rodents, all striding purposefully across the sidewalk, engaged in their godawful work. "Lookit all them creating all this useless work," he said. And here we were getting paid by Calvin Klein to stroll down the sidewalks of Manhattan observing it all.

Enjoy your life. That's what I want you to do more than anything. Part of that joy comes from a lightness of spirit that can find fun and entertainment in what others would find boring, routine drudgery. Maintain a light heart, a joyous sense of the world, and remember that as a temp, or perm, or whatever situation you wind up in, it is your life after all, *not theirs*, and you are the one who has to take control of it. Control it for the good of yourself, the betterment of yourself, and for the enjoyment of your daily existence.

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